



BR 121 .F6 1918
Fiske, Charles, 1868-1942.
The experiment of faith

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DEC 16 1901

THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

The Experiment of Faith

A Plea for Reality in Religion

By the Right Reverend

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NEW YORK

CHICAGO

Fleming H. Revell Company

LONDON

AND

EDINBURGH

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New York : 158 Fifth Avenue
Chicago : 17 North Wabash Ave.
London : 21 Paternoster Square
Edinburgh : 75 Princes Street

Foreword

THE writer was university preacher recently in a great collegiate town. He was feeling his way towards the message he was to give the young men and women who would hear him the following week. He spoke to several of the students about it and to one member of the faculties.

One of the students, with the frankness of youth, replied: "Preach on *anything except the war*; we have been 'fed up' on that." Another, a rather serious-minded young Churchman, said: "Suppose for a change you give us some straight Christianity; we get mighty little of it from the ordinary college preacher."

The enquirer took these suggestions to his faculty friend and asked what he made of the criticisms that lay beneath the suggestions. As he interpreted the thought of the men, it would appear that many people in these days are thinking about spiritual things more seriously than ever before. They want to find their way to some definite

Christian belief. They ought to be shown some definite Christian work. "It is true," said the speaker, "that we have had a pretty steady stream of preaching about the Great War. One after another the clergy of every faith have come and philosophized about it; one after another they have moralized over its lessons and made appeals to patriotism or religion. Of course we cannot get away from the subject. It colours all our thinking. But what we need is not so much direct preaching about the war as preaching which shows that the man who speaks is conscious of our thoughts and longs, with all his soul, to give us some light on faith's pathway in these dark and troublous days. The war brings many spiritual problems to the front. They are the same old problems we have always had with us, only now they stand out more sharply defined. Why should we not be told something of the answer of Christian faith to such questions—always with the war in mind, but never with the war dragged in? Try it." And then he added: "And if you can show us how faith is possible and what can be said to help the man who gropes towards it falteringly, so much the better."

The substance of these chapters was

given in the addresses which followed during that week of preaching. Some of them have been twice repeated since, very informally, in conferences for college men. Their apparent helpfulness, in such informal use, is the excuse for their publication in somewhat fuller form. They could not, of course, deal with all the questions suggested by our college friend; they only drive home one moral. They are, it will be seen, an appeal to men now outside the Church to seek to find their way in—both for their own sakes and for the Church's sake.

The pathway of faith to which they point is no new road; but so many have failed to walk it! This essay is a plea for reality in religion. Its theme is this: that faith is not mere intellectual assent to a creed, it is the consent of the whole man, mind, conscience, heart, will, to the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Because faith, essentially, is receptivity of soul, to know the truth we must strive to live the truth. The vital requirement of religion, therefore, is fidelity to present faith, obedience to accepted truth. As we live true to the truth we know, we pass on to larger truth and richer belief. Faith is "the seeking

spirit of desire"—the spirit that obeys, appropriates and uses and so comes to trust and believe.

That being the case, the believer in Jesus Christ comes to his faith only through genuineness and sincerity of life. He who would believe must be absolutely real in following. The book attempts to deal frankly and sympathetically with the difficulties of faith which keep many men outside the Christian fellowship, but it harks back constantly to the demand for sincerity of discipleship as the one pathway to belief. If, in doing this, the obligations of religion are pressed home somewhat insistently for the "unattached followers" of Christ, they will not complain when they discover that the shortcomings of Churchmen are dealt with no less frankly and with equally plain speaking.

C. F.

Syracuse, N. Y.

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The Experiment of Faith

I

UNATTACHED FOLLOWERS

JESUS CHRIST has many unattached followers, men of strong religious feelings and convictions who are not enrolled anywhere as Christian believers and feel that they cannot honestly identify themselves with any church. Such men are found in every class of society. We run across them often among working men, who are more and more growing away from institutional Christianity. We meet them, with greater frequency, in the business and professional world, where minds are keenest and thinking clearest. Their presence is specially forced upon our attention in these days of war. All around us are men who are consecrating their lives to the service of humanity, who are doing Christ's work and yet have not the stimulus of fellowship in Christ's army. That is our loss

as well as theirs, and it is hard to say for which of us the loss is the more tragic.

One of the big problems of the Church to-day is the man outside. So often he is the very man we need inside. What keeps him out? How shall we get him in? What shall be the terms of admission? He is asking these questions as seriously as we are. The very fact that he does ask is proof that he wants to come—if he can.

We are concerned now particularly with the man who does want to come. There are other men outside who have little or no interest in the matter. Some are quite satisfied to stay outside because they have drifted into a sort of "phariseeism of the publican." No; they do not belong anywhere—why should they? There are so many hypocrites in the churches already—they say. Others again (so we are expected to believe) are so faithful to their ideals that they consider it a sufficient excuse for not belonging to any church to state somewhat violently that they disapprove (as who does not?) of there being so many churches to choose from. Still others cannot see the need of a church at all. In a time of war, when millions of men are massed on many battle fronts, they believe,

apparently, that the real way to prosecute the Christian warfare successfully is to fight a guerilla campaign and so they refuse to serve in any division of the already pathetically divided army of Christ! These hopelessly antiquated folk may be left out of reckoning for the present. They are not really thinking men. They think they are thinking, when actually they are only "re-arranging their prejudices."

We have another type of men in mind now—that large body of men, keen of conscience and deeply religious at heart, who are not able to accept the formulated standards of faith as set forth in the creeds. They are usually very quiet about it. They say little, unless some one else starts the discussion. They speak, then, less in defense and protest than in sincere regret. They would like to believe more if they could. They feel that there ought to be a place for them, even if they cannot believe. Some of them have a very mistaken notion of the faith they cannot accept. They are really rejecting something which is not Christianity. For there is a wide difference between doctrinal Christianity as popularly understood and actual Christian orthodoxy. We rightly ask that he who denies Chris-

tianity shall be at pains to discover what it is he is denying.

Yet there are multitudes of other men who have more or less carefully studied the Christian creeds and for one reason or another cannot honestly and without equivocation accept their definitions. To find a message for such men has always been a challenge to Christian thought. It is more than that—it is a call to sympathetic and appreciative effort. If we could bring them to kneel with us at the Lord's Table, we should both gain by their coming. It is our shame that we have not realized before how much we need them. It is their loss that they have not sought with more patience and humility to find their way to Christian fellowship.

There are, of course, difficulties on both sides. Believers have failed, possibly, to understand the real longing, sometimes a very hunger of the heart for faith, in men who have not found in any Christian communion a sufficiently simple test of fellowship. There is no church, giving them the warm, living faith they long for, whose standards they can fully accept. There is none where they can believe more than half that is taught and preached—and when they

say this they say it more in sorrow than in criticism.

There was a time when the Church gave such men small sympathy. Their lack of faith was ascribed to the wiles of Satan; the test of orthodoxy was rigidly applied; the doubter was kept out, or cast out, with scorn.

The fault was not all on the side of the conservative and the orthodox. The heterodox were just as proficient in passionate denunciation, certainly were as dogmatic in their denials as the convinced theologian was dogmatic in his assertions. That tone and temper of mind has not altogether passed. Witness Mr. Wells's theological acrimony in his *God the Invisible King*. The entertaining author thinks he has discovered God. Like Mr. Chesterton's yachtsman (who slightly miscalculated his course and landed on what he supposed to be an uncharted island of the South Seas, only to learn in the morning that he had beached his boat near Brighton), Mr. Wells has really discovered nothing. He has simply been groping after truths which have long been taught in Christian pulpits, had he but known it. The new and strange thing, however, in all the discussion his

theme has aroused, is the appreciative sympathy and kindness with which Christian critics have received his philosophizing, contrasted with the irritating irreverence of the philosopher's own lively attacks upon beliefs which these same Christians hold most sacred. It is just as unquestionably true that in other days all the theologians were not black-hearted heresy hunters and all the heterodox disputants saints with souls as white as angels' wings. Bitterness was not all in the camp of the orthodox.

Nevertheless, undeniably, the conscientious objector to current theological belief usually found little sympathy or understanding. His questionings were received in horrified silence; his denials met with indignant denunciations. Later, though the tests of orthodoxy were not applied so promptly nor so rigidly, there was slight appreciation of the position of the perplexed enquirer and less honest effort to face his difficulties. Naturally, therefore, he became hardened in doubt. We are learning now to understand something of the real goodness of many a modern Thomas.

Yet, what are we to do with him? Suppose we abandon all credal requirements, including in the Church all who express a

desire to follow the Lord Jesus, without enquiring what they believe about Him. It might be conceivable that we should so admit men to church fellowship on the simplest possible profession of discipleship. Some Christian communions are already doing it. They are not growing any more rapidly than other Christian bodies. Certainly they are not manifesting a more vital Christian activity, with a largeness of vision and a world-wide mission such as attracts men of the great heart.

The Church rightly feels that its very life depends upon its setting forth fully and convincingly the deposit of faith which it believes it has received. And not its life only—that gives the wrong emphasis—but the life it lives to give. Surely it is not unreasonable so to regard its obligation. This conception of duty arises out of the profound conviction that the ideal which we call the Christian life sprang out of the Christian faith. "We cannot unravel the threads which knit the character which we know in its developed form as Christian, from the creed which appears, at every single point of the character, as its inherent and vital background." Dogma is not merely preached as dogma. We believe it

to be practically impossible to maintain for long the moral beauty of the Christian character without its doctrinal basis. Is not militant Prussia the natural fruit of a hybrid Christianity, with a dash of Nietzsche thrown in? "The thing committed to us is the whole mind of Christ; and Christ cannot be divided." Men may be unconscious of the influence, but the Christian life they are trying to live has survived only in a Christian atmosphere of faith. Their strength is partly an inheritance; partly it has been imbibed from the "diffused Christianity" which has silently moulded their thoughts and quickened their consciences from youth on.

Faith is not mere intellectual *assent*; it is the *consent* of the whole man (mind, conscience, heart, will) to the will of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. The end of faith and worship is life. If this is so, the Christian faith is vitally necessary. Its presentation should be as simple as possible, reduced to real essentials; but in these essential elements it must be consistently presented and fully preserved, because out of it springs the Christian character. In it also is expressed a definite loyalty to Christianity's Founder. The essence of the creed is this

expression of allegiance to Christ. He is its center and core. Once this is recognized, he who would follow Christ will at least approach humbly and prayerfully, patiently and sympathetically, to the examination of its simple fundamental statements about the Master for whom they profess reverent loyalty and to whom they would give faithful service.

When this has been said, we have at least reached a new point of departure. The realization of our common purpose may, perhaps, lead those who would consecrate their lives to the work of Christ to examine afresh the faith of Christians. The doctrines of Christianity are the logical exponents of its facts, and the facts are the basis of its life. We accept the doctrines, not as mere items of information, but as interpretations of that life—the life to which we would re-dedicate ourselves in these days of splendid service; the life we must try to understand if we would also strive to imitate it.

II

THE ULTIMATE TEST

WHAT is religion's essential requirement, its ultimate test? If we say that doctrinally it cannot be more than the simplest Christian creed—the short, unelaborated, apostolic statement of Christian truths as the logical exponents of Christian facts—may it be less than that? Shall we gladly allow the freest possible interpretation of the creed? Even though the Church maintain “the deposit” as its own standard, must it always be required, at the outset, of all who would come into the fold?

We cannot dismiss with a flat denial those who would so simplify the requirements for lay membership. They would still urge that doubtful believers be received into membership and communion, in order that they may grow into fuller understanding and acceptance of the Church's doctrine, just as we receive disciples whose ethical standards are unformed and whose exhibi-

tion of Christian virtues is very imperfect, meanwhile training them to become more consistent Christians.

The purpose of this essay is not to balance arguments over conflicting views as to doctrinal requirements for Christian fellowship; but to insist that there is one essential requirement which must be pressed home, whether a man believes much or little. Essentially faith is receptivity of soul. It is the spirit which trusts, believes, obeys, appropriates. The first enquiry, therefore, which we address to the troubled questioner has to do not with the quantity of his faith, but with its quality. If he is to be received into Christian fellowship, is he at least in the mood to desire larger and richer belief?

Something like that we ask, or should ask, of morally imperfect converts. We must not practically make it possible for anybody, with an easy conscience or a fat pocket-book, to become a church member somewhere—though the rivalry of sectarian Christianity has so broken down moral discipline, that often it would appear that this has become the actual situation. What we ask of the man of imperfect Christian practice is this: Do you *want* to do better? What we must ask of the man of incomplete

Christian faith is phrased in similar language: Do you *want* to believe more? If you desire faith, you must have receptivity of soul. Are you sure, then, that you want to believe? Have you a mind—no, have you a heart—open to the light? Tennyson puts it in some stanzas of *In Memoriam*, two lines of which are often quoted out of their context:

Perplexed in faith, but pure in deeds,
 At last he beat his music out.
 There lives more faith in honest doubt,
 Believe me, than in half the creeds.

He fought his doubts and gathered strength,
 He would not make his judgment blind,
 He faced the spectres of the mind
 And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own.

When Lincoln was accused of being an infidel, he answered with simple directness and gave some account of his earlier struggles towards faith. "I do not claim," he added, "that all my doubts have been swept away. It may be my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling my way as doubting Thomas did; but in my poor effort I bear with me, as I go on, that seeking spirit of desire for faith which was with the man of

olden time who cried, ' Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' "

Here is real faith, even though it be not the fully formulated faith of a professed Christian. What we need is to accept it, in full appreciation of its vitality, as a step towards " the faith "—that is, towards the point where the seeker finds in the formulated doctrine the answer to all his longings. If the way can be made easy by any free interpretation of the creed which does not deny the historic sense outright, so much the better; but what is most needed, and what he most has the right to ask, is a full appreciation of the vitality of his present faith, a glad acceptance of it as that which lies at the core of Christian experience, a ready confidence that if it is genuine he will be guided into other truth.

Is it genuine? That is the point. Has he, indeed, the spirit which trusts, appropriates, obeys? May it not be that his failure to go on to fuller truth is due to a flaw in his present self-surrender? The child-like spirit is of the very essence of faith. The modern Nicodemus must be born again. He is a good man who cannot perceive the Christ because too well satisfied with himself.

Once more: receptive faith means not simply the spirit of desire, but the spirit of obedience. Nicodemus must try to *live* the truth he knows—and try hard enough to lose some of his self-confidence. “I do not vex myself any more with questions I cannot answer,” says J. R. Green; “I am not impatient, as I used to be, with vagueness and dimness. I see that we must live, to know; to know the right, we must *live* the right.”

Here we have a test that cuts, too, across the path of the man whose statement of his belief is letter perfect, while yet he has never, apparently, made his intellectual acceptance of “the faith” lead him on to “faith” in its more vital sense. Has he been putting the chief emphasis on a form of sound words, instead of stressing the spiritual values of the great truths which the creeds declare?

That, after all, is the main thing—to find, not merely the *contents*, but the *content* of the creed. We must make it clear beyond peradventure that this ethical and spiritual content of Christian truth is its *raison d'être*. There must be no insistence on doctrinal tests without making plain the reason for safeguarding doctrine. That

reason has ever been the same: belief is not a bare acceptance of facts, it is an atmosphere to be breathed, a life to be lived; it becomes real faith only when it colours all our conduct.

It makes a vast difference the moment we begin to put the creed that way. It means that we take it as a working hypothesis and try it out in life by putting it to the test of practical experiment. Anything that meets this test is vital.

I believe in God—what does it mean but that I start with the assumption that there is a Moral Governor over the universe and that I mean to acknowledge His will as the moral law of conduct? That is something vital. Try it out and see whether it does not give life a new colouring. Hard to believe in a divine moral government in these days? Yes, of course. But give it a trial. Let your thought play around it and your imagination take hold of it. Before long you will discover within yourself, in the white light of this truth you are testing, the explanation of the problem of evil without. In your own lifelong disobedience you will find the root and source of the world's moral disaster; and knowing so positively the still insistent demand of the moral law

you will grow steadily more sure of the Moral Governor. If we love justice and hate evil, is it not God's own spirit that has taught us?

Then, next, you will need God the Father—Some One who knows and cares and loves and pardons. Well, you try out that article of faith. You begin to act towards God with an understanding that Fatherhood implies sonship and that love desires a return of love. And next: Jesus Christ. Before you deny His divinity, try to find out the ethical significance of such a faith. What does it mean but the realization of the divine in us; else how could God and humanity come together in the Person of the Christ? What does it mean but a new appreciation of the brotherhood of men in Christ, an understanding of the ineffaceable relation between man and man? Try that out in all human relations. Sink your differences and look for the fundamental virtues common to all men. Finding them, trace them up to Christ and see how they reach their perfection in Him, the manliest of men, who embodies and fulfills all your ideals. There is no article of the creed which cannot be tried out that way, with the possible exception of the Virgin Birth, and

even there the difficulty disappears when we take the fact in its right order. But of that later.

Enough has been said to indicate our belief that the Christian creed is really the foundation of the Christian character. The one is built upon the other. When one goes, the other, sooner or later, will surely go with it. And enough has been said, also, to point out faith's open gateway. What is the essential religious requirement? It is very simple: just this, that each bit of faith, however small, be used; each accepted truth thoroughly tried out. That means that we go from "faith to faith," step by step. It is the pragmatic test: does it work? But it is more than that, it is the way of further knowledge. Each truth translated into life will lead to larger truth. "He that willeth to do His will shall know of the teaching whether it be of God."

It does seem that this is the real appeal to be made to the men we have had in mind, men naturally better by far than some of us who have been admitted to church membership, men who stay out just because their consciences are tender and they will not come in unless they can be quite sure of coming honestly, without professing more

than they believe; men whom the Church sorely needs because they are men of splendid intellect, large ability and consecrated purpose who could bring to the Church's problems breadth of vision and greatness of achievement. We need them. We want them to come to us if they possibly can. Conscious that they have, possibly, capacities for a larger and finer Christianity than our own, we yet humbly believe that we have for them a simple recipe for faith. We have not always taken our own prescription; alas, that we must confess it! But whenever we have followed the advice, effect has always followed cause. We pass on the prescription the more confidently, because we are quite sure that it is in the line of a good man's thinking. He wants to live true to truth. Why not try out his faith, with the definite trust that here is the pathway to sure belief? We see through a glass darkly; but we can see enough to guide us. Why wait for the full light before taking the first step? Every man has some light. Why not follow it at once?

What, then, is the honest doubter doing with his half creed? Never mind, for the time being, the half he cannot accept—what about the rest? What is he making of it?

How is he using it? The ultimate test of religion is fidelity to known facts, obedience to accepted truth, use of present faith. Faith as a theory, however correct, is of little worth; faith as an incentive is the only faith that really counts. It may be the simplest, smallest measure of faith; but if we use it, it starts us on the way; it begins for us the divine adventure; it pushes us on towards experiment, and experiment is the road to discovery.

The ultimate test of religion is found in the question: Are you living true to all the truth you already know? Are you acting it out? "He that willeth to do His will shall know of the teaching." These are the words of Christ and they are His definition of religion's vital requirement.

III

THE AVERAGE MAN'S RELIGION

THESE chapters are not in any way pretentious of purpose. Because they are addressed primarily to thoughtful men who are unable as yet to accept whole-heartedly the simplest statement of the formulated faith of the Church, they are not written for mere "intellectuals." Not half the honest doubt in the world is the result of intellectual perplexity. Doubt springs rather out of the practical difficulties of plain people who give more or less thought to religious questions, at least occasionally, but are not specially skilled in balancing probabilities and making fine distinctions.

If it can be done without weakening the general argument—and I think it can—I should like to make this an essay towards faith that will appeal particularly to the average man—and the average woman. I think I understand them because I am just an average man myself. It is time that we average people came to our own;

time we had religious books written for us, and sermons preached for us, and churches made places in which we can worship, where everything is human and natural and nothing stilted and unreal.

Most books of religion have been written for intellectuals who are sorely troubled by difficulties of faith that plain common sense brushes aside as hardly needing explanation, or for trained Christians who have thought much about religious problems and are deeply interested in fine theological distinctions. Most churches have a cultural worship in highly developed devotional form and robbed of reality through the perfection of its performance by trained choirs, or else free and easy evangelistic services devoid of reverence and making no appeal to the deeper instincts of hearts hungry for the divine. Most sermons are either conventionally pious discourses preached for the edification of practiced saints who understand and love the vocabulary of homiletics, or exhortations to confirmed sinners—who usually are not there to hear the appeal.

The average man seems to have been left out of reckoning. He is not a hardened sinner. Of course he does sin, but he is

sincerely ashamed of his shortcomings and has not yet learned to silence his conscience. He certainly wants to please God, even though he is rather uncertain in the expression of his desire. Neither is he very religious. Religious people seem to him solemn and serious folk who lack any humour or light-heartedness and would make this a very sad sort of a world if they succeeded in denaturing the rest of men and settling them safely and sanely on their own dull level of respectability.

The average man has very simple ideas of religion. To him it means unselfishness, generosity, sincerity, cleanliness of soul, a genuineness and straightforward honesty that despises cant and is chary of anything in the way of religious profession, an abiding faith in goodness as he has seen it in his own wife or mother, a very real humility because of his own defects—a humility which we are quite justified in calling penitence—and a readiness, therefore, to forgive defects (or, as we should say, sins) in others; with it all, a general consciousness of God, of whom he is rather vaguely aware and about whom he finds it almost impossible to speak easily and naturally. Often the average man seems to have forgotten

God—and yet somehow we understand that he really is conscious of Him, as the child is conscious of the mother in another part of the house and would miss her if he knew she had gone away.

The really vital books of the war are the books which have made us see something of the average man's heart; books like *A Student in Arms* and *The War and the Soul*, which give us a fresh appreciation of the essential goodness of common men, just as what we have seen of the service of many strong men and women at home has brought its revelation of the real religion of such unattached followers of Christ.

The one passion of my own ministry has been to try to interpret the average man to himself. I want to make him see that all the ideals of goodness which he ever had are to be found in Jesus Christ. I want to have him feel that Christ is not the kind of a person the painters have made Him, but a likeable, loveable, strong, manly Friend and Brother, who walked the path of human helpfulness wherever it led, who came to face our difficulties with our strength, who never compromised and never slipped back into the easy path, but espoused the cause of truth against every error and took the

field in behalf of every virtue and kept straight on and never faltered and never failed, though the issue of courageous adherence to truth and right was Calvary and the cross.

I want to do more than that—I want to make men see that everything that Jesus Christ was God is, and I want them to understand that belief in the divinity of Christ means this. I want them to know that if there is a God He must be like Christ and I want them to believe that He is just that sort of a God, in spite of difficulties and in the face of all appearances to the contrary. I want them, when life is hard, to know that if Christ is God then it is evident that God is less concerned about making life easy than about making men strong and brave and great. I want them to feel, whenever the world looks dark, that God is behind the cloud, even if we cannot understand why He does not reveal Himself. I want them, in these troubled days, to know that belief in Christ means the certainty that an Easter always follows a Gethsemane and Good Friday. I want them through Christ to become so certain of God that they will gladly give Him the undivided allegiance of their lives.

After all, this is what religion is. Somehow we generally confuse it with knowledge about God and His world. We fancy that it means knowing what God is and having clear and definite arguments to prove His existence. Somehow we usually identify faith with complete understanding and reasoned belief.

Is it not true, on the contrary, that those who are most conscious of God are often least able to tell why they believe in Him? And is not this due to the fact that, after all, the greatest argument for God's existence is the instinctive belief of the race that He does exist? Men are naturally predisposed to belief. Instinctively they trust conscience and listen to the voice of the heart. Instinctively they put God and immortality among the indisputable facts of life. To them it is unthinkable that God is not or that this life ends everything, and knowing that the mass of men feel just as they do about it, they need no further arguments.

What they do need, is to act on their belief. That is the only way in which the roots of faith can spring up and bear flowers and fruit. The real venture of faith is to understand that God, if there is a God, is the one thing that counts. The great ad-

venture is to let the soul make its leap to God. Religion, says Donald Hankey, is just "betting your life that there is a God": acting on the probability, staking something on the truth of your decision.

We need knowledge, of course. It is good for us to reason out our faith, especially if we have any desire or expectation of passing it on to others. We need to have a reason for the hope that is in us. But religion is not knowledge; it is friendship, relationship, companionship with God.

Well, then, if we believe there is a God, the one essential thing is to try to establish intercourse with Him. That is really what prayer is, as we shall see later on. We need to get into the spirit of prayer even though we do not pray much in words—and the spirit of prayer is to have such a conviction of God and His righteousness that we find our real peace in the sure knowledge that we are following His will. That is the reason some men are finding God through the war. "Don't think for a moment," says one of the English chaplains, "that the Tommies are coming out of the trenches as converts by the thousands. They are not. But they are beginning to think of things seriously, even though they

will not talk of what they think, and they are finding the peace that comes from the consciousness that they are fighting on God's side."

Private Peat bears similar testimony. "We don't pray much in words," he says, "but every mother's son of us is honestly at peace with God because we believe that God understands and it makes us plain comfortable in our hearts. I have been two years in hell," he continues, "and have come back with a smile. People ask me how it is possible to come back smiling. If you had taken the biggest opportunity life ever held out to a man, wouldn't you smile? If you had gone down into hell for the sake of the people who were there already, to help them out if you could, wouldn't you come back, if you came back at all, smiling? For us the issue is as simple as black and white and we smile because we know we are doing what God wants us to do."

We need that conviction of duty faithfully done in all of life, through the courage of the commonplace as well as in the courage of the crisis. The average man is a little afraid of getting by himself and quietly thinking this out; but when he forces himself to do it, he knows by his sense of ease

and security, when he is really striving to do Christ's will, that he is on the right road.

The first step towards fixed reality in religion is to try to say all this to God. For that reason we have to pray in words, even though we find it a hard thing to do. We are helped to a firm faith as we give definite expression to our faltering faith. It makes our own convictions more certain. And it certainly must be pleasing to God, in the same way that it warms a parent's heart to have his boy tell him what he knows already that the boy feels. Hankey has shown us something of the religion of the inarticulate. If we are to get a real grip on God and make our religion more vital, it is our business to try to make it articulate, and this is what prayer is.

But all the prayer in the world can do no good save as it is the honest effort in this way to pledge the best that we have to the best that we know; or the expression, however confused and awkward, of sincere regret that we have failed in moral achievement.

What the average man needs to learn is that religion grows deeper and stronger as he tries to give expression to his thoughts about God. He shrinks from this expres-

sion of his thoughts even to himself; or more probably, he draws back and refuses to make the effort to express them. That is just where he fails to get a firm hold on faith. If there is a God, and if God is a Person, the essence of religion is to establish intercourse with Him. Out of that comes strength. Through that we become conscious of our own souls.

Through that also we become conscious of sin. The tendency has been to ignore it. Practically, the average man's philosophy has been that of Sir Oliver Lodge, who tells us that the best men are not worrying about their sins; they have let the dead bury their dead; what is past and gone had best be forgotten, they say, and real religion demands that we be up and doing; action, not introspection, must mark our path to God.

In a way they are right. The best method of getting rid of sin is to put something in its place. We cannot pull sins out of the heart, we must push them out by putting something else in. The best thing to do with an evil past is to make a fresh start and try to fashion out of it a splendid future. Yet, as Canon McComb points out, "we cannot drift into goodness without thought or effort"; we must learn the cause of past

blunders and discover the best means of destroying bad habits. Growth comes by moral decisions and decisions of the will presuppose serious reflection. "Sin is not an accidental scar, a wart or wen, but a deep-seated moral disorder." If we are to get rid of it, therefore, we must get back to the very heart of things; we must, in the very center of our being, keep a place sacred to God. "There is nothing absolutely good except a good will," and to make the will right we must get alone with God and in passive receptivity permit Him to show us what we ought to be and how He wants to use us.

This, surely, is where the average man fails and his failure arises out of the neglect to live true to his belief that there is a God. He does believe in God, and his common sense teaches him that God is a Person; but he does not follow out his belief by taking time to cultivate friendship with this divine Person. He forgets that we do not find the deep things of life; they find us. Our part is to incline the ear and open the heart. If we permit ourselves to live through this mysterious life on this mysterious earth with no outlook on the unseen and the eternal, God must withhold from us His

secrets. This is the simple thought that I am trying to drive home. A Christian is not a man who declares his belief in God and has accepted the facts of Christ's life, but a man who is striving with all his heart to get to know God and to establish friendship with Him through Christ.

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears; and
spirit with spirit can meet.
Closer is He than breathing and nearer
than hands and feet.

IV

THE OTHER HALF

IN summoning others to make the venture of faith, we start, as we have already acknowledged, with a confession and self-accusation.

It is said of Sir Oliver Lodge that when Dr. Gore was Bishop of Birmingham the great scientist rarely failed to attend services or meetings at which the Bishop preached. Once he was asked for an explanation. "Why do you always go to hear Bishop Gore," said the questioner; "surely you do not believe what he preaches?" "No," was the reply; "I don't; *but he does.*" It was an inspiration to listen to a man who was all on fire with faith. Honest conviction is always respected. Evident sincerity has tremendous drawing power.

Most of us must confess that our own lives have too often belied our creed. Intellectually we take ourselves to be convinced Christians; but the world would never guess it. There is no sharp line of cleavage between our lives and the lives of

others who deny what we believe. We declare the Christian faith to be the spring and fountain source of Christian living; but we fail to show that our statement is more than a fine-spun theory.

So we must start on faith's experiment ourselves. For ourselves and for others, we must press our Lord's injunction: He that doeth the will shall know. That is the point. Not how much faith, but how intensive a faith; how deep, how active? Faith as a grain of mustard seed can do great things, if it only be given the chance to germinate. St. Paul had the heavenly vision: the great fact of his subsequent life was that he was obedient to the vision.

The ultimate measure of faith is obedience: we must live true to the truth. Whoever is convinced of a truth, whoever accepts any set of views or statement of facts, whoever approves any particular course of action, must live in obedience to it. Whether we have much light or little, we must walk in the light. Some have an abundance of faith, others very little, just faint glimmerings of light as to some things and hardly any light as to many things. But whether we have much light or little, the supreme question is always this: What are you doing

with the faith you have? How are you following the light already received? Are you living true to the truth? Or is that truth just a theory that you have never really put to the test? Never mind the half that you cannot understand; what are you doing with the other half that you do understand?

A group of earnest men were pouring out of a convention hall where representatives of a national church had been deliberating on present tasks and opportunities, when one of them turned to a great leader, a whole-hearted, devoted bishop, and asked him what he felt was the real note of the gathering. Was it to be found in the inspiring conferences, in the quickened missionary spirit, in the splendid leadership manifested in some of the debates, in the harmony of spirit that appeared where sharp differences of opinion had been expected to result in serious clashes among men of different schools of thought? All these were enough, apparently, to call forth enthusiasm. But, with an expression so serious as to seem a little akin to dread, the bishop asked: "Were you not a little afraid of our drifting into corporate insincerity? This has been called a revolutionary convention; I wonder if it has not really been *revolutionary*?"

Vital subjects of present day moment had been considered; crying needs had sounded their claims; social questions had been given a hearing; industrial problems had been pressed for solution. In every case report and discussion had ended in counsels of safety and sanity. Admirable resolutions had been passed. The danger was that it would all end there. Having passed preambles and resolutions, would we forget them? Would we fail to see that resolutions are embodied truth packed into convenient form for subsequent action? When the time for the next convention came, would it be discovered that in the meanwhile all had been relegated to the minute book, beautifully engrossed and then neglected?

Is it not our personal peril? We recognize the truth and accept it; but we do not try hard enough to live it. In religion we are more apt to argue about what we believe or disbelieve than to set to work seriously to embody belief in action.

Because we so frankly admit the inconsistency in ourselves, we may be forgiven if we point out to others the value of the lesson our own experience has taught. The first step towards faith is very simple. It means

a readiness for the moment to let go all discussion of our beliefs and unbeliefs and to try to put aside for the time the things we cannot accept, that we may concentrate on the things we do accept. There is no one who does not know that with all his doubts there are for him certain well-established verities. At least he has a half creed. There are some things which for him are true. What is he doing with them? To start with the half creed and try to live it will be to make a beginning towards a fuller creed and a richer life. To obey, says Lacordaire, is like opening the eyes to the light. We see only as we look carefully; we believe only as we live prayerfully. Desire faith and it will come. Act out your creed and you will have a larger creed.

It is worth while to notice that those who first received the Christian revelation were the men and women who were faithful to the light they had; those who had long been in the habit of obeying the call of conscience carefully and so were ready for the fuller revelation. Think over the list: Zacharias and Elizabeth, both "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the law blameless"; Joseph, a "just man"; Simeon, "just and devout, wait-

ing for the consolation of Israel"; Joseph of Arimathea, "a good man and just"; Nathanael, "an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile"; the company of the apostles—they were penitents called from among the crowds gathered by the Baptist's preaching on the banks of the Jordan. When, afterwards, these apostles went out to preach Christ, the chief conversions were of those who were living true to the truth they had. Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, was "a devout man who feared God, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." At Perga Paul addressed "the devout Jews and those who feared God." At Thessalonica "a multitude of the religious Greeks" believed. At Athens and elsewhere those who were endeavouring, however imperfectly, to live up to the light they had were the ones who saw the truth of the new message, not the mere thoughtless heathen. The first Christian disciples were a picked company of conscientious, right-minded, God-fearing folk who were already in the pathway of faith; had started, long before, on the divine quest.

It has always been true; it always will be true. Here, indeed, is one exhibition, at

any rate, of the truth of the Master's saying, "To him that hath shall be given." The one vital requirement of religion (I am using another's words) is fidelity to known truth. Knowing the truth; admiring the truth; sighing after the truth; even making dashes towards the truth—this is not enough. We must live true to the truth.

What is the trouble with most men? Is it that they do not know enough about God and themselves; or is it that, in spite of knowledge and in the very face of facts, they are content to drift along as they are? What good would new truth do us, if we have made nothing of the old truth? Belief is not a matter of interesting dialectics; it is a gift for life. Live true to the faith you have, and it will grow; hold it in disuse and it will go.

For faith can survive anything except neglect. It will live through many trials; it will hold firm through many disappointments; it will withstand many shocks. The one thing it cannot survive is being ignored. It is given us as a rule to live by. If we try to hold it simply as an intellectual system, it will bring about a complete moral paralysis. If translated into action, it is inexhaustible power.

V

LETTING ONESELF GO

THE trouble with most of us is that we will not let ourselves go in religion. We make our belief in God a cautious consent to a logical proposition.

For of course most men believe in God; that is, they believe in His existence. The real difficulty is, that they assent to the statement of belief and then think no more about it. This simply means that God does not by any possibility count in their lives.

There are two things necessary to make our belief in God an energetic faith. The first is, to make the faith an affair of the heart and not simply of the head. The second is to understand that here, as in other matters, we are not to demand absolute certitude before we shall be willing to take the first step. There is such a thing as missing the romance of religion because we will not make ventures. Nothing venture, nothing have.

To begin with the first: Let us give the heart its due. Indeed, even intellectual consent to the first article of belief requires that. Faith cannot rest upon logical processes. The failure to take account of this is the first cause of unbelief. There is no clear, clean-cut proof of the existence of God. There is, of course, probable proof, moral certainty; but there is no demonstrative proof. That, however, need not trouble us.

The night has a thousand eyes,
And the day but one;
Yet the light of the bright world dies
With the dying sun.

The mind has a thousand eyes,
And the heart but one;
Yet the light of the whole life dies
When love is done.

The heart, therefore, has something to say as to God's existence. We cannot arrive at a knowledge of Him by purely logical deductions. We must trust the instincts and affections. And we must accept their report as being just as worthy of credence as any mathematical formula. Some men have lost their faith in God because they have tried to buttress belief after the same fashion that they would draw up a legal con-

tract. God is not found that way. He is more than the end of a syllogism.

On the whole, most of us are certain that God is; though when we come to balance the arguments, there is something to be said on the other side. For myself, I should say that the biggest argument against God is the presence of evil in the world. I cannot understand why God did not make men good and keep them good. Or, if that would mean not moral goodness, but mere mechanical perfection, I cannot understand why, if there is a God, He permits evil to go so long unpunished.

It would seem that my difficulty is the difficulty of most men. How many times, since the great war began, have we asked where God was when the Huns swept over Belgium? Where was God, when the *Lusitania* sank with the women and children? Where was God, when the Turks swept over Armenia and left it an abomination of desolation? Did He not care? Did He look on unconcerned when Edith Cavell was murdered, when Germans were cutting out the breasts of women and chopping off the hands of little children, when sanctuaries were defiled and dead cats nailed upon altar crosses? The literature of the war has

been full of this passionate protest against the presence of evil in the world. From *Mr. Britling's* confused and tortured wrestling with the problem, on to the latest novel of Mrs. Humphrey Ward, we have thrust upon us the same question of faith. In *Missing* the young lieutenant, just married and leaving to-morrow for the front, tries to think it out. He was one of my "average" men, yet he had his troubled perplexities over the general scheme of things in this strange universe that we must believe came from God. "He thought of all those mangled men—out there—in France. Who is responsible—God or man? Man, of course. But man's will is—must be—something included in God's will. So his young mind raced through the old puzzles in the old way."

His difficulty is mine—yours. I know that I am not alone in crying out in these days for God to show His hand and stretch forth His mighty arm. I do not see how His goodness can be reconciled with suffering and sorrow and sin and pain. My difficulty is not a new one. I have never understood why the wicked should prosper; the ungodly flourish like a green bay tree. I go by, and lo, in contradiction to the psalmist, he is

not gone; he is very much in evidence. Things continue to go well with him. The righteous, meanwhile, have a hard time of it, only too often. The very best of men come to the saddest times, and God seems indifferent.

All this would make me lose my faith in God completely if I did not wait for the heart to speak. That tells me that I need God, and that He must exist to satisfy my hunger. It reminds me of the mysterious voice of conscience, the thing within me that sets up the standard of right and wrong—that very standard by which I have demanded divine intervention—and I feel that the moral law of necessity presupposes a Lawgiver. When I listen to the heart speak, I remember the unchangeable rule of happiness: I know that there is some real connection between joy and goodness, some real connection between sin and unhappiness. The moment I stop and let that sink in, the law begins to work. I cannot be happy and contented apart from obedience to what I call the good and right.

Above all, I remember many experiences since I came to believe in God through Christ which deepen my faith. Through Jesus I learn of a God who once entered into

the tragedy of human life to show that He understands and sympathizes. In the study of His life I find my ideas of God and goodness wonderfully enlarged. In the story of His death I gain "a perennial experience of renewal and renovation." All these things make me believe in God far more truly than cosmological or teleological or any other logical argument. After all, they tell me what I want to know about God. It does not much matter to me that God is omniscient or omnipotent or omnipresent; what I want to know is whether He cares for me and cares that I care for Him. And, when I listen to the voice of the heart, I am as sure of that as I can possibly be of anything in the world—I am more sure of it than I am of anything but my own existence.

Well, now, what am I going to do about it, once I am sure? Just stop, content that a difficult question has been settled and that I have answered it correctly? Just declare that God is and let it rest at that? It does seem sometimes as if this were what most people do, and because this is what they do their faith in God is never firm and unflinching. Faith was not given us, to be labelled and laid aside among an assortment of mental concepts. It was given us to use.

So, once I have come to believe that there is a God, it is my business to try to know Him. I take it that is what prayer is. We start out with the assumption that there is a personal God who knows us and cares for us, and so we go to Him and speak to Him just as we would to an earthly father. Prayer does not mean that we shall be constantly asking God to do something for us, always begging Him for some favour; it means that because we believe that God is, we are going to try to establish a warm, living relationship with Him.

For that matter, we do not even need to be certain that God is, before we make this venture of faith. Bishop Butler was wise in his generation and we have not yet outgrown his wisdom. He taught us that probability is the very guide of life; and we know that it is so, in business, in government, in moral conduct with its numerous choices of conflicting duties, in the sanctities of human life, even in exact mathematics. Why not let it be our guide in religion? On the whole there are reasons enough for believing that there is a God. Why not take a chance at it and try to establish relations with Him? Unless we do chance it, the fact of His existence or non-existence is a

thing of utter indifference. What does it matter to us whether He is or is not, if we are not trying to know Him?

Now the actual fact in the case of many men is, that they will not take this step into the region of probability. They accept God, but they stop there. They make no effort to know Him. They spend no time in thinking about Him. They let Him severely alone. Then, by and by, they marvel that their faith fails. Or they argue with some one else whose faith is gone and wonder that the unbeliever is not convinced. "Prayer," says Carey, "transmutes an intellectual conviction or probability into something personal and passionate by leading the soul into the presence of God and leaving God and the soul together. Yet there are people who have the face to argue and dispute about religion from a religious standpoint, when they themselves do not pray." Why, the most they could gain by further proof would be some increase or decrease of intellectual probability; and what good would that do them? The very purpose for which their faith was given them was that they might put it to work; and they have kept it laid up in a napkin. The value of belief, however imperfect, is

that it shall be the incentive to sonship. Men must know God as a Father if they are to keep on believing in Him at all. And they cannot realize their sonship if they hold no relations with Him.

We often fancy that belief comes somehow out of hard thought, that it is the result of logical processes, the outcome of philosophical enquiry. Not at all. What really happens, in most cases, is that the practical attempt to live as if there were a Divine Father turns out to be the way in which we come to know Him. Faith is the corollary of conduct. In practical ways we try out a theory and then we come to know it as fact. We act on the germ of faith, and it grows and expands. The seed becomes a tree. The truth we have acted on becomes a larger truth. We walk in the light while it is yet dim, and lo! it begins to shine to the perfect day.

The ventures of faith! And the first venture is to learn to let oneself go! All this, and this, and this, I believe to be true, it sounds very probable; but its truth or falsity is going to be a matter of no moment whatever unless I try it out. I must make the experiment, and act on the chance, if I am to find God.

VI

THE FORGOTTEN GOD

LET us start with a man who has the dimmest possible faith in God. We pin him down to his actual belief, and he confesses that its content hardly goes beyond the fact of God's being. He cannot, on the whole, say more than that he believes there is a God. He does not know anything about God: he merely acknowledges His probable existence. What can be said to such a man? Has he enough faith to make a start on?

Of course. Indeed, it is a good start that he is honest enough to state his creed in the smallest and most restricted form. It indicates that he has really tried to think things out. The one thing of which he needs to make certain is this: for what purpose has he done his thinking? Why does he want to know whether there is a God or not? What change will it make in his life if his certainty deepens? Does he expect to put his knowledge to the practical test?

In other words, if we believe in God at all, we must begin to live as if we believed in Him. Most of us, let me repeat, do not. Practically speaking, we banish Him as soon as we have a hint that it is possible to make His fuller acquaintance. Whereas, if there really is a God, we should above all things desire to be in conscious, felt, sustained relationship with Him.

One of England's great preachers, in an address on the search for God, pictures a group of young men standing together in the smoking room of their club discussing religion. They are tossing about, pell-mell, all the difficulties about God and the Bible: the creation stories of Genesis, the mistakes of Scriptures, the miracles, the doctrinal definitions of the creeds, the divisions in the Church, the failure of Christians, the variety of religions, unanswered prayer, eternal punishment, and a score of other objections. Suddenly some one interrupts with a question: "Yes, gentlemen, and yet you want God, do you not?" As the question is asked, there is supposed to appear in the room a face and figure, a vision of Jesus Christ.

Had such a figure really appeared before such a group, we know what would happen.

In a moment every chair in the smoking room would be vacant, cigarettes and cigars would be thrown away and every man would spring to his feet and then fall to his knees, white, tense, breathless. When the vision departed, his one desire would be to get away from the crowd, to be by himself and think. Something corresponding to that ought to happen to every man who has become convinced of God, however slight his faith. Only as something like that does happen, will his faith grow. If God does exist, surely the first thing to do is to put oneself in His presence and bend before Him in reverence.

That can be done best alone. We must go apart and force ourselves to think and think hard. In the old days men wrestled with God. Through agonizing struggle they made their way to Him. Nor were they satisfied until they had done something corresponding to the action of kneeling in the smoking room before that crowd, with all the others looking on or kneeling themselves. Men made their way to the mourners' bench or the confessional. In some way they openly confessed God. Whether we press this upon a man at once or not, at least we can say this, that he must

begin to take his small belief seriously, he must do *something* to toughen his faith and tighten his will.

The man who believes there is a God, but knows nothing more, will find usually that his failure runs back into this, that he has never started on the divine quest. If it were a matter of business he had to thrash out, or a legal tangle he had to straighten, or an engineering problem he had to solve, he would tackle the matter in the only sensible way; go off and shut himself in his room; pull himself together into an attitude of sharp attention, and concentrate his whole mind upon the thing till he had thought it out. Why will not the same man go aside and spend some time in trying to put himself into vital union with God—always assuming that he has accepted the probability of God's existence?

A mystic once wrote on practicing the presence of God, and wrote about it as sensibly and practically as if he were a modern business man. Only he did not have half the intellect or half the practical ability of the modern business man, and he had to practice God's presence among the pots and pans of the monastery scullery instead of doing it in the comparative quiet of

the limousine on his way to the office. At any rate, wherever and however we do it, we must stop once in a while to remember that God is near—around and about us.

It will be a matter of surprise how the sense of God's presence, thus occasionally recalled, will grow into a continued habit of mind. The involuntary consciousness of the divine comes as the result of occasional voluntary recollection. I would not dare write this, if I did not know it not simply out of my own experience but on the authority of far better men than myself. Nor would I write it if I did not have it on the authority of men who are not merely religious, but are sane, sensible, practical, level-headed men, of every-day common sense. They will tell you—ask one of them, if you will—how, in the morning, before they go out to work, they kneel and consider quietly that God goes with them. They could tell you—but they will not, for they have a modest reticence—how they rise from such prayer with the sunshine in their souls. In every case, if you can get them to talk of it, they will tell you that the consciousness of the divine did not come to them all at once. It grew with practice. They made up their minds not to forget

God, and they found that God did not forget them.

Actually, have not most of us forgotten God most of the time? That seems to be the fact that has pressed itself home to the finest minds in this time of war; indeed, has pressed itself home upon every type of mind in the nations who are feeling most keenly the agony of the struggle. It has suddenly dawned on men that while they declared their belief in God they had practically left Him wholly out of consideration in the rush of life. "Neither was God in all their thoughts." Face to face now with the great realities, they are finding God again where normally they might least expect Him—in the pain and horror of trench and battlefield and hospital.

We had forgotten You, or very nearly—
You did not seem to touch us very nearly—
Of course we thought about You now and then;
Especially in any time of trouble—
We knew that You were good in time of
trouble—
But we are very ordinary men.

And there were always other things to think
of—
There's lots of things a man has got to think
of—
His work, his home, his pleasure, and his wife;

And so we only thought of You on Sunday—
 Sometimes, perhaps, not even on a Sunday—
 Because there's always lots to fill one's life.

Now we remember ; over here in Flanders—
 (It isn't strange to think of You in Flanders)
 This hideous warfare seems to make things
 clear.

We never thought about You much in Eng-
 land ;
 But now that we are far away from England
 We have no doubts, we know that You are
 here.

That is where Jesus Christ comes in.
 The war, at the start, was a great trial to
 most men's faith. They could not under-
 stand a God who withheld His hand. Nor
 could they quite accept the Old Testament
 view that even in bloodshed and agony God
 is working His purpose out. Much less
 could they accept the thought that the
 nations were passing through the furnace
 of affliction because they had forsaken God
 and that He was using the barbarian as a
 scourge in His hand to bring men back to
 Him. "In the hand of the Lord there is a
 cup and the wine is red ; it is full mixed, and
 He poureth out of the same." That seems
 too much like the figure of a slave driver.

Personally, I am quite sure that there is
 more in the thought than we have been

penitent enough to admit. I do not like the way it is put, any more than I like the language of some of the old evangelical hymns of the atonement; but I am sure that it stands for a great truth, and I believe that a good many men whose consciences are better than mine feel about it as I do. I see in the world agony not God's visitation, but the awful result of man's violation of His laws. The very spirit which makes me hate this evil is proof of the God of righteousness from whom my own moral standards come. And I wonder, trembling, what God's feeling about evil must be, if my hatred of it is so intense. Other men, I know, feel as I do. It was such a man, in the days when the American nation entered the war, who said: "Some of us have been impatient for action; we have cried out from time to time 'How long, O Lord, how long?' But we must now confess that it was wiser to endure for a season until the uprising of a patient nation had become *akin to the wrath of God.*"

The wrath of God! How naturally we fall back upon the expression, when our own spirit is stirred within us. However, let that pass. There are many other good men who cannot see it my way, and are not

able to find any possible form of expression in which it can be embodied as an acceptable truth for them.

The man who starts to make the most of his half creed will force himself to put aside these troubled questionings for a while, and simply act on the faith he has. In spite of it all, he believes in God. Let him *act as if God were* and his belief will grow. Especially let him assume for the moment that God has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Never mind (for the present) who or what Christ is—at least we owe Him the supreme revelation of God, or (if you wish to put it that way) the highest conception of God. To me He is more than that: He is the very unveiling of deity. I can hardly wait to put this down later in its logical place, because I believe so deeply that this is just where Jesus Christ comes in. He assures us of a God who is like Himself, and His assurance helps, however difficult it may be to understand, however seemingly impossible to look for any clear light on life's mystery. At any rate, God or man, Jesus Christ does make the tragedy easier to endure. A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, He at least takes His stand at our side to help us

bear the burden; He does not offer any explanation of suffering and sorrow; He does something better, He shares it. Somehow I feel that if we stop to think about that—if we take time to assimilate it—we shall be well on the way to larger thoughts about Him and deeper faith in the meaning of His life. Well, that (to repeat) is where Christ comes in—the “Christ in Flanders,” who is the Christ of Calvary.

We think about You kneeling in the Garden—
Ah, God! the agony of that dread Garden—
We know You prayed for us upon the Cross.
If anything could make us glad to bear it,
'Twould be the knowledge that You willed to
bear it—
Pain—death—the uttermost of human loss.

Though we forgot You, You will not forget
us—
We feel so sure that You will not forget us—
But stay with us until this dream is past.
And so we ask for courage, strength, and pardon—
Especially, I think, we ask for pardon—
And that You'll stand beside us to the last.

The point I have been trying to make clear is again the argument of the last chapter: Probability is enough to give you a start towards God. Here, as elsewhere, it is the guide of life. On the strength of

it, make a beginning. If God really is, we dare not forget Him. Do not be guilty of the absurdity of such reasoning as this: I have thought it all out, and on the whole, and in spite of the difficulties, I believe there is a God. Therefore—(look at it in black and white and see how absurd it is!)—therefore, I am going to act as if He were not. Rather, on the mere chance that God is, I am going to try never to forget that He is. I am going to work hard to realize His presence. I am going to put myself into this work at least as conscientiously as I put myself into my business or professional work. If there is a God, I want to know Him. At any rate, I don't mean to forget Him, if I can help it. Whether I understand all or not, I am not going to forget Him any longer. Take my word for it, that way lies the light.

VII

THE JOYOUS YEA

WE make a mistake, says Canon Adderley, when we contrast belief with atheism or agnosticism. The real contrast is between faith and worldliness, between remembering God and forgetting Him.

Truly the fact of God ought to change one's whole attitude towards life; for to believe is to say that God is and that this is the one thing that matters. Real faith is not an occasional recollection of the existence of God and the mystery of life; it is a constant remembrance of God. It is a vivid realization of the spiritual order. It is to feel that back of the material world is a spiritual world which now and then breaks through the material and gives the attentive observer manifestations of its presence and activity. It is to cease being content with the life that is near at hand and always evident and to stretch out towards the life that is invisible. It is to take this invisible life for granted and to try hard

to realize it. Not to believe is simply to omit the spiritual from our thinking. That is what Adderley means when he defines unbelief as humanity organizing itself apart from God. It is what Eucken means when he speaks of faith as a sharp nay and a joyous yea.

Now the trouble with the ordinary doubter—whether he is an intellectual agnostic who does not think that God can be proved, or a practical agnostic who ignores God and omits Him from his calculations—is that there is nothing at all sharp about his nay and yea. And the trouble with the ordinary believer is, at bottom, the same; he has simply fallen into the easy habit of a nonchalant acceptance of truth. To him faith is merely a formal acquiescence in certain statements out of which he does not expect any new experiences for life. He is a believer but not a seeker. He does not understand that the first effect of faith should be to drive him out in a determined effort to learn and assimilate truth. Faith merely starts with acquiescence; it must move on to hope and expectation and aspiration, or else it becomes merely “a dried up acceptance of formularies.”

There is a good deal of raw agnosticism

in the world, but the real tragedy is not in this; it is in the unthinking practical agnosticism that labels itself faith, but is really the most hopeless kind of unbelief—the thoughtless indifference of apathy.

Drummond reminds us that the soul, in its highest sense, is a vast capacity for God. “It is like a curious chamber added on to being—a chamber with elastic and contractile walls—which, with God as its guest, can be expanded illimitably, without God shrinks and shrivels until every vestige of the divine is gone.”

This will show that faith means not merely to assent to “the joyous yea,” but to pursue it. If muscles that are not used become flabby, if the limb that is bound up loses its power, if the eye shut in continual darkness would soon be no better than the eye of a mole, if the language no longer read is forgotten, the spiritual analogy ought to be perfectly plain. The disuse of any faculties, physical or mental, is followed by their atrophy. The failure to use spiritual faculties results in the same way in spiritual paralysis. That is the history of many a man in his loss of faith. He ceases to use his spiritual faculties, neglects prayer, gives no time to the apprehension of the divine,

leaves God out of his thoughts, and after a time he tries to use the faculties of the soul and finds that they are dead. Because he has allowed himself to become immersed in business or professional work, or scientific pursuits, to the exclusion of everything else, and has ceased to exercise the functions of the spirit, a progressive paralysis begins, which, unless checked, will end in loss of faith for himself and doubts as to its reality for others.

The peril stands out more plainly if we remember that religion is the endeavour to establish intercourse with God. To know any friend intimately makes demands on us. "Only now and then, under the pressure of interest and affection, do we pass through partial manifestations of personality to the character behind them," says Illingworth, "and then in proportion to the depth and greatness of the character is the difficulty of really coming to know the person." If it is dangerous to trifle with a human friendship, how much more dangerous to trifle with the divine! Faith is bound to go if we will not make the effort to have it grow. With God we cannot take a non-committal, half-way attitude. "God is everything—or nothing." That is what so many of us for-

get. In one of Chesterton's amusing satires an atheist and a Christian become warm friends because they are both dead in earnest. In a world of indifferent people they two seem to be the only ones who really care whether there is a God or not, the only ones who see how much it matters.

A sharp nay and a joyous yea! It means, again, that in an age when men are mildly indifferent, the man who has really given in his "yea" to the fact of God will be eager for truth and service. In a day when religion is often merely a matter of lazy half-interest, he will be keenly in earnest. When so many others have no convictions and are expert in balancing on the fence, he will set his ideals high. Christianity's real foe is not active unbelief, but the mild indifference and harmlessness that expends itself in the effort to live on terms of peace with the world and thinks of religion as the last thing on earth to be excited about. The trouble with a good many men is that they haven't enough faith even to disbelieve. Let us have anything, therefore—anything in the world—but good-natured toleration. Let it be a sharp nay if it must. If we do believe, even a little bit, let it be a joyous

yea; a yea so sure of the truth to which it gives its glad assent that it expects out of it new experience and fuller life.

Jesus Christ came that men might have this life and have it more abundantly. Yet He seems to have been willing that it should come to them slowly and by degrees. One of the striking things about His ministry is the gladness with which He welcomed the most rudimentary faith, if only it were genuine, and His perfect satisfaction if only He had awakened the desire for God.

That comes out strongly in His teaching of the apostles. Surely with them at least we should not expect Him to be satisfied until He had led them all the way along the path of faith. They were His close friends and we should expect Him at once to tell them everything. Yet, even with them, He seems content if only He can be sure that He has made for them *the great suggestion*. His task was to make them feel their need of God, until one by one they gave in to Him, capitulated, fell under His spell. He spent His ministry in planting in their hearts the love of God and the life of godliness, out of which all later knowledge should grow. To put it in another way, the great

work of His ministry was to *sensitize their souls*.

How strange it is, for example, that as He sees the time of His departure draw near there is no oppressive sense that His ministry has come to an end too soon. The apostles felt it keenly. There were so many things He had not said and so many things He had not done; they could not bear to lose Him, especially they could not bear to think of it until He had said all and accomplished all. But with Christ Himself there is no sense of prematureness or incompleteness in His mission. He can leave these followers of His, sure that they are secure, because He has given them a susceptibility to God. It was expedient for them that He go away, because it was best for them that His ministry should not be localized and limited, and once having given them a habit of mind that made them responsive to God, He could go away, without anxiety, in absolute certainty that they would be led and guided. The Spirit could work easily on souls that were sensitized. The fruit of faith would grow quickly out of the soil of such an honest and good heart. Their faith, He knew, was the faith of receptivity. It gave them the "expanded soul."

We need this thought to balance and complete our statement of the first test of religion; namely, to live true to the truth we know. That, it was said, is all God asks. Whatever you believe, be it much or little, live it. Well, then, does that mean that it makes little difference how much we believe? If all that is asked of us is obedience to known truth, does it not follow that the less truth we have the easier life will be? Does it not amount, after all, to saying that in the long run truth matters very little?

Ah, but we know it does matter. As a man thinks, so is he. The very value of the truth is that it "assists life, makes life, induces life." Instead of fancying that those who have little truth to live up to may be left happily alone in their blissful and irresponsible ignorance, we thank God that there is more truth to give them. We ourselves would not be content to be pagan and heathen, just because as civilized men more is asked of us. We would not want to be mere clods—crude, ill-bred, unpolished—just because, if we have had the advantages of culture, we shall be required to remember that we are gentlemen. Nobody wants to live in a back alley because if he lives on a pleasant street his neighbours

will expect of him the good behaviour and moral decencies of avenue life. So in religion, larger truth means larger appreciation, richer life, fuller experience, deeper delights. We breathe a purer atmosphere, receive richer inflowings of grace, have more strength to attain and more power to serve.

“Oh, do not pray for easy lives”—that is the way Phillips Brooks put it—“pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers; pray for powers equal to your tasks. Then the doing of your work shall be no miracle; you shall be the miracle. Every day you will wonder at yourself. Every day you will wonder at the richness of life that has come to you as God has led you on from faith to faith.”

VIII

A RADIATING GOSPEL

JESUS CHRIST'S first great contribution to faith was His unwavering belief in God as Father. His proclamation of that truth took new form. God was "Our Father": the divine fatherhood and human brotherhood went together. And there was no limit to the Father's family: all men, everywhere, were His children, brethren in different rooms of the Father's house.

Nothing could make Christ's faith in the Father falter. We are troubled, for example, over the problem of evil. The world seems sometimes "a great orphanage" rather than the home of a Heavenly Father's children. Surely Jesus Christ must have felt this more keenly than we. His soul was like a delicately adjusted instrument which recorded every human doubt and difficulty, all human suffering or sin; yet He still proclaimed God as Father and acted on the belief, and though a man

of sorrows and acquainted with grief He proclaimed His faith to the end. All the world now is fighting to vindicate this idea—the thing which Germany repudiated. It troubles us that Christians should be forced to fight; but it makes a world of difference when we fight because it is the only means we know to be effective, things being as they are, to stop a war of deliberate aggression. And what is it we fight for? Something some of us had forgotten we believed in—the common rights and mutual duties of all mankind, based on the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of the race; something which the world never even thought of as an actuality until Jesus Christ made it the constitution of His kingdom.

The idea of the fatherhood of God and the consequent brotherhood of men was a new conception—new, not because it had never been uttered before, but because never before had it been set at work. It was a truth that had been lying dormant. The Jews had wonderful passages in their prophetic writings which told of the fatherhood of God, but they never dreamed that His care extended alike over all the nations of the earth; they were born to national isolation and reared in race exclusiveness.

In the Greek and Roman world also the idea had found expression. Terence had a fine phrase in one of his plays about human brotherhood which won loud applause in the theatre, and Cicero wrote charmingly about love for all mankind; but both Cicero and Terence merely played with the thought as a pretty fancy and the gladiatorial contests continued to draw crowds to the arena. Then Jesus Christ took the idea which up to that time had been a pretty fancy or a racial boast, and made it the basis of His world kingdom. The wonderful thing is that when men begin to live true to the truth which Christ made vital they catch something of Christ's faith. Just the moment we cease to allow the thought of human brotherhood to remain a cant expression and try to translate it into warm reality, we rise through the realization of our common brotherhood into a firmer faith in the Divine Father.

The great world war could never have broken upon us had men been making any real effort to live this elemental truth. Everywhere we were content, rather, to talk about it eloquently without actually trying to get down below the surface differ-

ences of race and dialect and to learn the mother tongue of the human heart.

Just now, I know, we need especially to pray hard for deliverance from national self-righteousness, and so there is a certain danger in using Germany too frequently as an "awful example"; yet Germany has been so glaring an instance of the tragic consequences of a self-centered development, that it is hardly possible to leave the moral undrawn. For forty years its people had learned and repeated "Prussian incantations" until there was built about the nation a "wall of moral isolation." At home and in church, in every social class, as the first lessons of school and the last in the university, Germany's people were drilled, with painstaking efficiency, into a colossal national self-glorification and self-adoration and a boundless contempt for the rest of the world. German needs, German hopes, German ambitions, German aspirations filled all their thoughts; and they ignorantly followed rulers who exercised lordship over them and desired to use them to extend this lordship over all the earth.

When that is said, however, we must have a care lest we be carrying a "moral umbrella" that shields us from criticism and

permits it to fall the more copiously on all around us! How absurd to point to Germany's amazing tribal arrogance, so unrestrained and unashamed, when the root of the sin is found in every nation. Look at England. Her insularity was more than physical. How little pains she had taken to understand the rest of the world; how often the supercilious superiority of the English traveller had fanned the flames of national hatred. The average Englishman lived in utter indifference, if not in utter ignorance of other peoples. Even with a world empire to be governed, his political leaders often gloried in their own intellectual isolation. And here in America, "the melting pot of the nations," we were deaf to the opportunity which cried at our doors. With multitudes coming here of many kindreds and tongues, we had made little effort to fashion these millions of foreign born into one loyal and happy people. Not till war revealed the national peril did we begin to labour for a deeper unity. We were content to live side by side in race isolation and often in race antagonism, even as we were living in class exclusiveness and class antipathy.

Class exclusiveness and class antipathy!

Ah! how recreant we had been to the great cause of brotherhood for which men of other days willingly gave their lives! A striking war poem pictures the martyred men of the first British armies calling on the men of to-day to "take up their quarrel with the foe."

In Flanders fields the poppies grow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks still bravely singing fly.

We are the dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunsets glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe;
To you from falling hands we throw
The torch; be yours to bear it high;
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies blow
In Flanders fields.

So the noble army of Christian martyrs calls on us—not "to take up a quarrel," but to bear the torch of truth and not to break faith. How we had forgotten that faith! We shudder as we read of the thousands of lives lost in war; but we had been resting in complacent content while thousands of

lives were sacrificed in times of peace, through ignorance, drudgery, poverty and disease. They were our brothers and sisters, yet we did not feel their heartache. "You care a lot about me"—so the poor, murdered factory girl of Georgia is made to say in *Mary Phagan Passes Judgment*—"You care a lot about me, now that I am dead; you have spent thousands of dollars trying to learn who mutilated my body; you have broken into prison and murdered a man, that I might be avenged. But why did you not care for me when I was alive? I was but a child, but you shut me out of the sunlight. You held me within four walls, watching a machine that crashed through the air, endlessly watching a knife as it cut a piece of wood. Noise filled the place—noise, dust, the smell of oil and bad air. Why did you despise me living, and yet love me so now? I think I know. It is like what the preacher told me about Christ: people hated Him when He was alive, but when He was dead they killed man after man for His sake."

So in the world of nations and in the world of industry we had alike forgotten of what spirit we are!

"The nation is only the larger individual."

All the while there had been the call to each one of us to break down the barriers of class and bring all, high and low, rich and poor, head-workers and hand-workers, people of leisure and people of toil, into a closer unity where each could be interpreted to the other and all could live and work together with mutual understanding and mutual respect, and few of us were heeding the call. Perhaps in the Christian Church as nowhere else there was a real attempt to mediate between classes. Despite the Church's natural conservatism, and despite its seeming lethargy, there have always been prophets to interpret it to itself. Christianity has shown a miraculous power of reform and resuscitation, and in the present era of social regeneration that power is manifest as never before. Whatever criticism may rightly be made against institutional Christianity, none has been more acute than that which its own sons have uttered, and among all who are preaching the new religion of sacrifice and service nowhere has the message been delivered with greater fervour and power than in Christian pulpits. In every church there are brave souls recalling Christianity to its Lord and voicing, for others without, their vague

longings for a deeper brotherhood. Not long since one such called on well-to-do Christians to convince the world that they had indeed "broken through into reality" by making sacrifices on a large scale and becoming chief agents in destroying all undue privilege by which they and their class could profit.

Miss Vida Scudder is one of a group of women who combine in a remarkable way a passion for social reform and an abiding faith in the power of Christianity to give to the coming social, industrial and economic readjustment a deeply religious note. She reminds us that many of our present difficulties in the prosecution of the war are due to past failure to realize the obligations of brotherhood. To take an outstanding illustration, "it is worth remembering," she tells us, "that had American cities been nearer to our own ideals Russia might have been held to firm fellowship with us and our allies. We always meant to clean up those New York slums—some day. We always meant to give that last man his chance, to lift that appalling per cent. of our working population above the starvation line—some day. But we were not in the least of a hurry. History was in a hurry, however;

and word reached Russia that American democracy was a sham."

Who shall say that we may not, even now, hear the call? Are there not signs that at last the challenge has been measurably accepted in these days of war, when many who had ruled men, industrially and politically, have become true servants of democracy and are revealing potentialities of patriotism long unsuspected, as well as demonstrating literally their desire to give rather than to possess? War has not been without its compensations, and not the least of them has been a new understanding of the privilege of power and a new appreciation of the debt it owes to the community.

Has the man outside quite realized all that this means? Has he quite appreciated how much of this inspiration for service has come from the churches? As he takes his own place in the ranks of the new brotherhood, has he quite understood that it is all a rebirth of the spirit of Christ? Does he find in it no call to consider with himself the significance of that fact?

Once more: is not the new spirit of public service a call to all of us, within the Church and without, to try out the fact of human brotherhood in our private relationship?

“Be a part of some other man’s life,” says one whose words had the lifting quality of a true prophet of God—“be a part of some other man’s life, his hopes and fears, his joys and pains. Do not be satisfied with seeing men divided off into sets and parties and stations. Get down below these things and become simply human. Dream the most wonderful of all dreams, that men are brothers all and sharers of one another’s destinies.”

It seems a far cry from all this to the Church’s missionary service, but is it not essentially the same thing? For what are Christian missions but Christian brotherhood on a large scale? And what was Christ’s message but a radiating Gospel? That is the reason we preach Christianity everywhere: not because we question whether any of our fellow men can be saved without Christianity; but because we know, apart from any questions of their eternal welfare, that they need it now. It means so much to us, that we are unwilling to keep it to ourselves.

It would be daring, perhaps, to say that the man outside will be won only when the Church realizes its world-wide missionary

call; but is it too much to say, when we remember that missionary enthusiasm is really but the expression of the Church's belief in its world-wide mission, and when the fulfillment of that mission means that the Church has at last begun to live true to the truth of human brotherhood, at last has risen above parochialism and nationalism and has attempted the larger task of making of one blood all the peoples of the earth?

Now and then we are reminded of a cloud rising in the East which possibly may grow till a storm breaks as terrible as the present world war. The danger is again and again denied, of course; but we know that many of the men who will be the future leaders of Japan have cast off their old religion, as have the leaders of China. Suppose, when they come into their power, they have no new religion, no new moral standards, no sure moral guide—shall we not have a peril worse than Prussianism, with its practical repudiation of Christianity? And then suppose, on the other hand, they have been taught the radiating Gospel of the Christ who first made brotherhood a living truth and proclaimed it as the basis of His kingdom—would not that help to make the world “safe for democracy”? Not with-

out reason did Jesus Christ leave to His Church a world commission.

Only through Me! The clear, high call comes
pealing

Above the thunders of the battle-plain —

Only through Me can Life's red wounds find
healing;

Only through Me shall earth have peace again.

Only through Me! Love's might, all might
transcending,

Alone can draw the poison fangs of hate.

Yours the beginning! Mine a nobler ending —

Peace upon earth, and man regenerate!

Only through Me can come the great awakening!

Wrong cannot right the wrongs that Wrong
hath done;

Only through Me, all other gods forsaking,

Can ye attain the heights that must be won.

Can we not rise to such great height of glory?

Shall this vast sorrow spend itself in vain?

Shall future ages tell the woeful story —

Christ by His own was crucified again?

And so to the Church and to the un-attached Christian the challenge is the same. Only as the Church realizes its mission, will its appeal to the man outside become an insistent and ringing challenge, for it will show him a call at home more fully realized and a world call merging into it. It would

seem to be the one challenge that cannot be evaded. Tell a man that he must be individually converted and come into the Church to keep his personal salvation secure, and you have at most a selfish summons; it does not challenge faith. But tell him what the kingdom of God means; tell him that the Church is the nucleus of the kingdom; tell him that its business is the establishment of human brotherhood; tell him that this will mean a new social order; tell him that many men in the Church are trying to interpret for it this radiating Gospel; tell him that they want his help in establishing God's rule over every department of human life; tell him that the simplest belief in the Fatherhood of God is a summons to join the ranks of a world army; tell him that this army is to "war against war" by giving the coming nations of the earth a spirit other than "tribal allegiance" and "national self-glorification"—and to that call he may give his joyous yea; in that he sees a splendid vision.

IX

THE ESSENCE OF PRAYER

IN Jesus Christ's teaching of the divine Fatherhood is the only faith in God worth having. "Better no God," says Canon McComb, "than a God other or less than the God of Jesus."

The reason is plain: because faith in God as Father assumes that He is a Person with whom we may have conscious relationship and intercourse. Few men have not some realization, more or less intense, of a Supreme Power bearing some sort of relation to the world. Whether they have read his philosophy or not, they agree with Herbert Spencer that "it is absolutely certain that we are ever in the presence of an Infinite and Eternal Energy out of which all things proceed." Sometimes the thought is borne in upon us with special force, burdening us with the sense of an Awful Presence. We think about God, when we do think about Him, with momentary awe and oppression, much as the child thinks of the darkness or the thunder. But Jesus

tells us of a God who is a Person, not merely a Power or a Principle, and if a Person then one who can be known and loved and served; one with whom we may have communion and companionship. That is vital; it is of personal interest and importance; it means something to *me*—and to others like me. Nothing else that I may come to accept about God matters in comparison with it; nothing matters at all, if this is not true. "A God to whom we cannot pray is no God at all."

There can be no developed personal life without companionship. The full life demands close and intimate relationship. The man who has no friend is but half a man.

And the man who does not pray is attempting to live his life in isolation.

In the narrower life of the village or country community we see often the peril of isolation. Removed from the centers of thought and activity, the man of the small town is likely to live a contracted life, alone and aloof, thinking only of the things which concern himself. It need not be so. There are fine things to be done if he can be made to see them. Master minds of literature open to him inspiring conceptions of duty,

if only some one will introduce him to them. In the quiet life of the small community, freed from the excitements and distractions of the restless city, there is splendid opportunity for the rich growth of personality. No one who has read David Grayson's charming essays can have failed to discover that it is possible to see truth more clearly, and in seeing to enrich life more fully, in the quiet of nature and among a few real friends, than in the strain and stress of the crowded city. Yet the fact is, that without close contact with the larger world the provincial dweller generally grows steadily more provincial. His outlook on life contracts; his personality shrinks and shrivels. In the first centuries of Christianity the pagan was simply the countryman—the isolated man of the distant places, whose life was unrelated to the larger civilized order.

Now what we need to understand is that, religiously speaking, the man who does not pray is a "pagan"; that is, a solitary man, living apart from God, unrelated to the Source of Life.

Here, however, is some one who freely admits all this and yet cannot pray because

he cannot be sure he believes in the reality of prayer. All the difficulties of prayer thrust themselves into his mind against his will. Why should a loving God withhold any gift from His children until they ask for it? Why does God, seemingly, leave unanswered the prayers of good men? What value is there in intercessory prayer—prayer for others who may be making no move themselves? How can he believe any longer in what we used to call Providence; much less, how can he believe in a special Providence that shapes particular lives? He is unable to reconcile prayer with the reign of law and the uniformity of nature's processes.

That is the great difficulty we have been obliged to face in these days of war when prayer has seemed so unavailing. Probably more prayers have been offered than for many years. Men and women who had long since ceased to pray or had done so in perfunctory obedience to custom have now been driven to pray often and anxiously and earnestly. Yet with their prayers have come new doubts and difficulties. And for the many who have prayed as never before, there are almost as many others who have ceased to pray, because they are determined

to be honest with themselves. Face to face with the great realities of sin, sorrow, suffering and death, they have felt the demand for utter reality in religion and they will not do what seems unreal. The old ideas of Providence are gone, and they are not blinding themselves to the fact. Many a man who has, with deeper seriousness, laid hold on great elemental truths and faced life with more resolute earnestness, will confess nevertheless that he is not a praying man.

For we cannot put ourselves into anything if we are not really convinced that it is worth while; and prayer as he knows it has not been worth while, he thinks. In times of great danger he and his friends have prayed and the danger did not pass. In times of impending sorrow they prayed but death came none the less certainly. In times of distress he himself has agonized in prayer and the heavens were closed and God did not answer. Why expect that He would? There are laws of health and they work with inevitable regularity; there are laws of economics and ruin follows their violation; there are larger laws of nature and though slow of operation they are always sure.

Suppose we ask such a doubting ques-

tioner to apply religion's ultimate test. Is there nothing he accepts about prayer? If he has some small grain of belief, what is it? How far can he go?

In nine cases out of ten the answer will be the same: Yes, after a fashion I believe in what you call prayer; but I explain its effect psychologically. Prayer is a subjective influence. Those five or ten minutes now and then help; they soothe, calm, uplift, enlighten. But beyond that I know nothing. Whether the strength comes from God, or whether it is my own mental reaction, I cannot say. All that I know is that the attempt at divine communion brings something of peace and strength.

Well, is not that a fair start? Pray just that way. On the whole, you believe there is a God, though you are not quite sure what we mean by calling Him a Person. Assume that He is and speak to Him. With all your doubt and uncertainty, without philosophical assurance, pray nevertheless. The wonderful thing is, that the man who begins prayer in that spirit invariably gains a fuller faith. The reason so many of us do not believe in prayer more confidently is because we have not practiced it more faithfully.

And then there is this to be said, that possibly the man's very doubt is indeed a hint towards the correction of a false conception. After all, has it not really thrown him back upon the primary purpose of prayer? It is a distorted idea of prayer, which regards it principally as petition. In fact, one's assurance of the subjective power of prayer is a suggestion that he actually has the germ of right faith. It may draw him into an effort towards the kind of devotion God wants.

For, indeed, the more he thinks of it the more he will come to feel that the effect of prayer is a far greater thing than his own subjective reaction. He will begin to feel that in reality it is intercourse with a Person. Sometimes the religion of Christ seems hard to grasp because it is so profound; but really it is easy to grasp because it is so absolutely human. We ourselves are persons, and we know how one person understands and absorbs another, how one man's heart feeds on the heart of another. We know men who by their mere presence make us strong. There are men in whose friendship courage and faith and large-heartedness feed and grow. In their presence we cannot be weak or petty or unbelieving.

Now what is prayer in its essence but placing oneself in the presence of the divine Friend and absorbing His life? It means not the changing of God's mind towards us, but the changing of our whole frame of mind towards Him. It means spending some time with Him, a long time if need be, because it takes a long time to change the whole tone and temper of a man's soul and free it from everything that cannot be countenanced in one of God's children.

Even if we cannot see this at first we go on with the experiment of prayer; for, taking it at its lowest estimate, the experience means at least a development of one's inner life and without that personality evaporates. "The man who has no refuge within himself," writes Amiel, "who lives, so to speak, in his front rooms, is not a personality at all."

Yet surely the man who prays will discover that his prayer is more than personal self-development. The very fact that leads us to believe there is a God compels us to believe He is a personal God. From Him come all things and He is more than the sum of all things created. The greatest thing about me is my personality, and there must be something in God akin to that, an

infinite Something of which my human personality is the finite reflection. God is a person, not a principle. And all that we know of personal growth and development suggests, as has just been pointed out, that it comes not merely from self-introspection but from contact with personalities stronger than our own. It is but a step from our subjective experience of the power of solitude to the discovery that when we are most alone we are really not alone. We begin to be conscious that we are in a divine presence and that the strength which we receive is not a reflex of our own will but an inflowing of personal power from without.

Is not all this leading us to understand better what prayer is? It is the opening of the soul to the breeze of heaven. Or, better (for we must not phrase it in anything but the language of personality) it is the uplifted heart. That is the way the psalmist defined it. "Show Thou me the way that I should walk in; for I lift up my soul unto Thee." It is the effort of the human spirit to place itself in conscious relationship with the divine Spirit. It is the soul *looking Godward*. It means "bringing God and the soul together and leaving them alone." If

it does nothing else for us, we may well be content if it brings us some new consciousness of the supernatural, the eternal, the divine. "The man who rises from his knees and goes out to his daily task unable to discern any answer to those moments of supplication save a new assurance that God is with him has answer enough," says Bishop McLaren; "he has put out his hand in the darkness and even though it be for the briefest second he has touched the Divine Hand."

Now we see why the prayerless man is a pagan. He has been living apart and unrelated—out of touch with God. Then he begins to pray, in the simplest possible way, without much more in his mind than that he means to relate himself to God, and at once something happens. He finds that he sees life more as God must see it; he does his work more in God's way; he lives his life more as a member of the Father's family.

We cannot go before God in that way without unconsciously taking His point of view. Companionship produces resemblance. Association with men of the large heart makes us grow into the likeness of our associates; and companionship with God makes us more like God. It gives incentive

to do one's best in the things known only to self and hidden from all others.

Now the wonder of Christ's teaching about God is that it just takes all this for granted. God is Father; then, of course, it follows that we are to live with Him; then, of course, we are to speak with Him; then the essence of faith is to keep the soul receptive to His influence.

So the man who acts on his small bit of faith moves on to larger faith. As he prays he learns that essentially prayer is conversation with God. If that is true, then there is nothing about which he may not speak with God, and speak simply and naturally.

If he thinks more about the prayers of Jesus, however, he will learn that his prayer must take account of some of the difficulties which troubled him in the beginning. These difficulties, even when viewed in the light of his new experience, will not disappear, but they will lead to an adjustment of his petitionary prayer—an adjustment which will rob it of much that he has been accustomed to regard as precious, it is true, but a change which will give it new values and make it a finer and manlier act than it was before.

In the first place, he will find that while his prayer horizon has become wider, the range of petition has somewhat narrowed. If God rules the world by law, and to grant some prayers would mean breaking a link in the chain of cause and effect and throwing the universe into ungoverned disorder, then he will not expect immediate and direct answer to prayer where the laws of nature are perfectly plain. Though, of course, he will remember as well that there may be laws of the spiritual realm, as yet unperceived, and that his prayer may possibly set in motion forces which counterbalance physical forces, just as by mechanics he can overcome the law of gravitation. Especially with regard to prayer in time of sickness, he will remember that through psychotherapy we are beginning to see that more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. At least he will see that he has much to learn, and he will have an open mind instead of a doubting spirit.

Once more, he will learn to be modest in petition. The Lord's Prayer teaches him that. It warns him to ask for few things for self, many things for others and much for the increase of God's honour and glory and the advancement of His kingdom.

Therefore he will be most concerned in bringing to God the world's sorrow and the world's sin and asking His help in restoring the world to the moral harmony and ordered beauty which must be in the mind of the divine Creator.

Again, he will discover that the answer to prayer may often come through the quickened mental and moral life of the one who prays. That will fit in with his original feeling about the subjective influence of prayer. God answers many prayers through human agents and in human work. The skill and understanding of the physician, the new health laws which medical science is constantly discovering, the deeper sympathy with the world's pain and the keen desire to help which at length must so lighten the world's burden—who knows what part prayer has had in all these? The new sense of corporate responsibility, with its education towards a better industrial order, and the new spirit of social service which has brought light into so many dark places and made human life so much less unendurable—who can say what prayer has done in this enlightenment? There is, indeed, "intercession which is coöperation with God," producing as a late fruit of Christianity a

growth of the social spirit which makes possible the rebirth of a Christian community and the releasing of its activities until it becomes the strongest force in the world.

Finally, he will learn that every prayer must be made with a reservation: Thy will be done. This does not mean simply the spirit of submission, although that is a part of the thought. It means earnest purpose to work for the things which God wills. It means keenness of vision to perceive and know the things we ought to do and persistent purpose to seek grace and power to do them. It means that we desire spiritual insight to judge our work and make our decisions as God would have us. It means living our life as a gift from Him. Because this ought to be the background behind every prayer, to pray is no easy work. We have to take time, and shut the world out, and learn to concentrate the mind on God, and subdue our impatience and fill ourselves with the spirit of obedience, until we can think temperately and accurately, judge calmly and become masters of ourselves and loyal servants of Him whose will we would accomplish.

Let the man who wants strong faith in prayer try to pray seriously. His own

reasoning shows him that prayer, to amount to anything, must mean real effort; it cannot be casual or perfunctory. Let him act on what his reason makes so clear—act and act and act again.

So the seed faith of the questioner has in it the condensed essentials of the finest things that prayer can mean. At first the larger view seems to rob prayer of its power by destroying belief in its mechanical efficacy; but this is not really the fact. What we have lost is the certainty of getting our own desire; we have gained, instead, the knowledge of God's will.

He asked for strength, that he might achieve; he was made weak, that he might endure.

He asked for help, that he might do larger things; he was given infirmity, that he might do better things.

He asked for riches, that he might be free from care; he was given poverty that he might be wise rather than care-free.

He asked for power, that he might impress men; he was given weakness, that he might seek God.

He asked for all things, that he might enjoy life; he was given Life, that he might enjoy all things.

He has received nothing that he asked for; he has received more than he ever hoped for.

His prayer is answered—he is blest indeed.

X

THE UNVEILING OF DEITY

IF God is not the God of Christianity, He ought to be; we can never, now, be content with any other. Men in general do not realize how little they know, apart from the Christian faith, of the kind of God in whom they can believe. Now and then some daring philosopher attempts to elaborate a new idea of God, only to succeed, by contrast, in revealing the perfection of the New Testament conception. Even the most casual study of comparative religion leads to a similar discovery. The world's best thoughts of God are found in Christianity; all that is weak or unworthy has been eliminated from it. In God the Father, as revealed in Jesus Christ His Son, we have the last possible word in religion. Generation succeeds generation and each finds its highest ideal realized in Christianity, each sees in it new spiritual appreciations, but none has ever added to the actual content of its faith. All we can ever

ask for, it has had all the while to give. Were we to catalogue all the qualities we desire in God, we should find them all in the God of Jesus—and much more beside.

But is Jesus Christ's idea of God a revelation—a literal unveiling of deity—or is it only the last effort, the truest and best conception, of the highest and best of men? Has He given us merely a splendid "interpretation" of God, or has He really drawn aside the curtain of the sanctuary so that we can see the Father's face?

"And man created God in his own image, after his own likeness; in the image of man created he God." So has been expressed the thought that God has never specially revealed Himself, that our idea of Him is but the result of our own reasoning, so that "the best God is the God of the best men." Man wants a divinity and therefore works out the idea of divinity for himself. The Kaiser's idea of God is quite different from the God of Phillips Brooks, for example! The Prussians find the war spirit in their own hearts. Then they set it up in the heavens and call it God. So, again, the New Testament conception of God is a tremendous advance on the Old Testament conception; but we will be told that this is

because men's moral conceptions had wonderfully enlarged during the centuries from Moses to Christ. With man's moral growth comes a growing appreciation of what God should be. He keeps on working, enlarging upon his ideals of deity until they become reasonably perfect and satisfying.

Is, then, the God of Jesus a real revelation?

It helps us in answering the question if we take note of the fact which gives to Christianity its real significance. It is not simply that Jesus Christ has given us the "last word" about God. The marvel does not end there. The perpetual miracle is this: that we find in the life of Jesus the God of Jesus. That is the wonder of the Gospel story. We cannot separate the divine character which Christ portrayed from the human character which He made so attractive. Our ideas of God as they have come to us out of the diffused Christianity which colours all our thinking are inextricably interwoven with our knowledge of what Christ was.

To put it in a very simple way: were we to ask any man to think long and carefully of all that he wants God to be, and then describe all that his hungry soul longs for,

the description would hardly be other than a picture of what Jesus Christ was in His earthly life—not merely a picture of what He tells us that God is, but a picture of what He Himself was. We could not ask for a God other or better than Jesus Himself. We cannot think of any attribute of deity of which we have not the human counterpart in His life. He *was* all that He *taught*.

Then there is this further fact: Jesus claimed to be of divine origin. If His claim be true, then all that He asserted of God we know to be fact; for we know what God is in knowing what Christ is. If His claim of divinity be disallowed, or explained away, then we are once more in the dark. We have had a wonderfully beautiful conception of God as the thought of the Best of men; but—He may have been mistaken. He rose to the heights of human aspiration; but He could not have been sure, any more than we are sure.

So we come to the man who does not know what to believe about Jesus.

“What think you of Christ?” we ask, and he cannot tell. “I am not quite sure what I believe. Indeed, I have not troubled over-much, it may be, to find out; because to me

the essential thing is my belief *in* Christ, not my belief *about* Him. I cannot honestly answer your question in words of no uncertain sound. I only know what the life of Jesus stands for. I admire and revere its supreme beauty. I appreciate to the full the splendour of His teaching. I bow in adoration before Him; I worship the Father of whom He taught. But beyond this I cannot go—I simply do not know. Is it not enough to follow Christ, without troubling ourselves to understand Him?"

There is something so fine about such an answer that it warms the heart of the believer. And yet—and yet—the question is the question of our Lord Himself: "What think ye of Christ?" Its importance, we have just said, lies in the fact that only through our right answer to it can we be sure of the God of Jesus. If Christ were only a good man, then we should have but one more instance of such a man, serving faithfully and deserted at the last. But if He is the Son of God, then we have light on life's dark mystery. What we want is to know of a surety whether God is the God of love we have been told He is—oh, how we do want to know that in these days that try men's souls! If Jesus is divine, then we

can be certain. He is the assurance that God Himself has entered into the tragedy of human life, that He has experienced our sorrow and suffering and that He sympathizes. What Christ was, God is. What Christ said, God says. What Christ did, God does. What Christ felt, God feels. Does God love? He gave His only begotten Son.

Having said that, we ask our friend to start as before on the path towards faith. Our appeal to the man who reveres the beauty of Christ's life is again the same: Live true to your truth. You accept Christ as the embodiment of humanity's ideal; very well, then, try to be all that you admire. Of course I know you are conscientious and sincere—this is no questioning of your moral character. You more than meet the standards of ordinary present day religion. Your life is highly respectable and eminently useful; it fulfills all the ethical requirements of your class. But you know, do you not, that you have not actually and literally taken Christ as your model. You know you have not been striving, with serious and steadfast purpose, to embody His every ideal in your daily life. You know that you have been satisfied with standards lower

than His. Your circumstances are different, of course, but you know that you have not steadily sought to translate Him into terms of to-day. You know that you have never fully and frankly faced the task of applying to the very different conditions of your life the principles which guided Him in the life of Palestine two thousand years ago. You know, indeed, that you have hardly more than surface impressions of His teaching; you have never dug down deep to discover the principles of conduct which ruled His life and should rule ours.

Suppose you try it. Begin to live with Christ, to live with Him long and closely. Just go on, quietly measuring your life against His. Try to live *exactly* as Christ would were He in your position; do exactly what He would do; say only the things He would say; banish every thought that could not by any possibility find place in His mind; put aside every ambition and give up every plan and every cherished desire that you could not imagine His considering worth your chief effort. You have had the vision of goodness—try to follow it faithfully, exactly and persistently.

Ah! if we tried to do that, how soon our doubts would dissolve and our difficulties

vanish and the truth be made plain. Because we ourselves had made an honest effort towards a lofty ideal, had tried and failed, we should begin to understand the significance of the Gospel story. The days of Christ's life on earth, we should see, were days of tremendous import—a time when the spiritual, the supernatural, the divine manifested itself in an undeniable way. It would become our conviction, as it has been the conviction of the ages, that Jesus Christ cannot be explained in human terms alone. He is something more than the highest product of the human race. We set His life over against our lives, and it seems natural to apply to Him the words of the ancient prophecy, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Back in the minds of many who cannot accept the fuller faith in Christ is the feeling that if we admit that He is God we are taking away what is most precious in His life, His "real, genuine, flesh-and-blood humanity," and are substituting a majestic

and unapproachable figure for the human, toiling, loving Man we revere. If it were true that orthodox theology robs us of a Christ who is wholly and genuinely one with ourselves, men would be quite right in their insistence on a restatement of the Church's teaching; but as a matter of fact, it was the constant effort of Christian thinkers to safeguard the true and full humanity of Christ while proclaiming also His real divinity. The Chalcedonian decrees, for one who will take the trouble to study them, prove this. The Christ of the creed is the human Christ who emptied Himself and restrained His divine powers and lived His life in human strength alone, subject to human weakness while perfectly responsive to divine grace. Only so much of His Godhead appears through the humanity as is consistent with a natural human development. He never called upon His divine resources and powers, He never summoned His divine wisdom and strength; He was what He was as man, with man's powers, through man's prayers, in man's communion with God. Sanday suggests that the divine in Him was like the subconscious in us; that is, not to press the analogy too far, only so much of it came to

the surface as could be expressed in a truly human life. His humanity was not an unreal thing, as if He were merely acting or playing a part.

Nor must we forget that humanity itself has sparks of the divine. "The only idea we can form of a God whom we should desire to worship," says one of the authors of *Faith or Fear*, "is one who exhibits, while He transcends, the characteristics of the best men and women we know. He must be a Person who manifests the love and courage, the strength and beauty, the patience and self-sacrifice, the justice and wisdom, which we find scattered in little patches here and there in the lives of some whom we have met. It is because Christ did so completely embody the essentials of the perfect life, which are seen and known to us in glimpses here and there in human history, that we can say that the character which we believe to be divine has actually been manifested in the world."

Only as we understand what humanity was meant to be can the idea of Incarnation be possible. There is something essentially so splendid about our human nature that God can really enter into that nature without ceasing to be God. So clearly was this

seen by some of the early Christian fathers that they regarded the Incarnation as inevitable and appropriate even apart from its redemptive purpose. It was "God's natural and eternal and inevitable destiny to manifest Himself as man."

To give full force to such thoughts as these is not to empty the Incarnation of all meaning through the assertion that Jesus Christ is divine as we all are, only "more so." It is simply to recognize the natural kinship of the human and the divine through an appreciation of all that is finest and best in humanity; to see, therefore, the possibility of its use in the self-revelation of deity. It is to think of God in terms of humanity carried to infinite perfection. It is to see how the varied rays of human goodness meet in Christ in the absolute unity of perfect light. It is to see that a character manifesting all that is fine and high and true and noble in all the best men of all the ages, and manifesting it in such surpassing measure, is a Character which can be defined only in terms commensurate with divine perfection. It is to think of God in Christ not in terms of immensity and almightiness, but of identity of spiritual qualities—that is, identity of spiritual Life. We are dis-

couraged in our thoughts of God if we fix our minds chiefly on the greatness of the Universal Mind. To think of God in Christ is to bring Him near, to remove the abstractness and loftiness which keep the soul from warm and living contact with Him. It is to remember that He is not far removed from the world or wholly unlike men.

This makes the Incarnation, as Donald Hankey puts it, agreeable to common sense. "We cannot understand or perceive the spiritual unless we can establish contact with it through the medium of our physical senses. Just as we see electricity revealed in its effects on matter, though the stuff itself eludes our senses, so we can understand and perceive the divine Spirit in so far as He is revealed in His effects on physical beings." The Incarnation is such a revelation through a perfect medium. It is the self-identification of God with humanity, so that in Christ God is laying bare His heart for all to see.

All this we are on the way to realize the moment we begin literally to live true to the truth we know about Jesus. Christ never came among men, saying, "I am God; you must accept it and believe." He would have us know by experience rather than

prove by argument. So it was that the first disciples came to know Him. They did not reason from the divinity downward, but from the humanity upward. They believed in the divinity through their experience of the perfect humanity and so believing they handed on their faith as an inheritance which the perpetual experience of the power of Christ in those who really believe has made continually more credible. Unique in character, they came to understand that their Master was unique in nature also.

This method of approach may help us in some of the special difficulties of the present day. Take, for example, the question of the Virgin Birth. We have seen, as we took our road towards faith, that belief in the divinity of Christ is in no way dependent on belief in His miraculous birth. We learn that Jesus is the Son of God exactly as the first disciples discovered it, by living with Him long enough and closely enough to see that the real miracle is the continuous miracle of His life. Nothing could be more wonder-compelling than that. It is at once our shame and our inspiration. It is so absolutely unique that the only worthy ex-

planation of it is found in the creed: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God . . . Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven."

But if Jesus Christ is divine, if at His birth an Eternal and Divine Personality entered into a new mode of existence, and manifested Himself in human form, then it would hardly be strange or unreasonable if His birth were unlike other births. The fact of Jesus Himself is so unique and miraculous that we may rightly expect the method of His entrance into the earthly life to be unique and miraculous also. Face to face with a life that cannot be explained save as the unveiling of deity, we ask how it would be possible for an Eternal, Divine Personality to clothe Himself in human flesh after the ordinary mode of human conception. When a child is born of human parents, a new personality enters upon its life. When Jesus Christ was born, it was no new personality that appeared, but He who is from Everlasting.

We must start at the right point. Assuming that Christ is God (and we have barely touched the fringe of the argument for that fact), here is something which has

no equal or likeness in the annals of earth. It is not the case of a new man coming into life, but of the Creator of all things manifesting Himself in a particular life. "If a divine life was entering into our weakened humanity," said a former Dean of Westminster in *Some Thoughts on the Incarnation*, "can we think it inappropriate that from the outset this life should manifest its power to transcend the natural order by which we are limited? If miracle is ever in place as a witness to the intervention of a new power, challenging our attention and manifesting the 'finger of God,' was not the coming of the Son of God in human flesh a fit occasion for miracle?"

Once we separate in thought the *fact* of the Incarnation from the *mode* of its accomplishment, we have stated the two truths in the right order and can approach them with a due sense of their right proportion. Then we are not making the mistake of resting our belief in Christ's divine life on the frail foundation of an acceptance of the Gospel accounts of His birth. On the contrary, we are ready to adopt a less antagonistic attitude in our consideration of the evidence of the miracle of the birth, because it is secondary to the greater miracle of the Life,

secondary to it, but singularly consistent with it.

Then, too, we see the importance of the emphasis the creeds have always placed on the Virgin Birth. It safeguards both the truths we have been considering. The fact of the birth guarantees the actual humanity of Christ as against the tendency to make it humanly unreal; the uniqueness of the birth is the guarantee that the One born is unique in His Personality—the very Son of God.

And the fact of this unique Personality baffles any other explanation than that of the creed. Does that explanation seem too great to be true? In fact, it is too fine and splendid not to be true. “The very God! think, Ahib”—so Browning makes Karshish the Arab physician write to his friend—“think, Ahib; then the All-Great were the All-Loving too.”

XI

THE FACT OF IMMORTALITY

EVERY preacher who has given careful thought to the preparation of an Easter sermon knows that his words are but an echo of the hopes and longings of his congregation. The value of the sermon lies in this, that it is the assurance of things hoped for. It is like an obligato which repeats and lifts higher the chorus of their own hearts' song. There is, in all men, a deep and passionate yearning for a life beyond this life of which the creed of the Christian is the positive satisfaction and assurance.

It is from this ground of common hope and faith that we must begin any discussion of the resurrection. We start, therefore, with the simplest possible belief in a future life. When we declare our faith in "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting" we mean—if, for a moment, we may brush aside all technicalities—simply what we commonly call immortality; we

mean the conviction that, after death here, personality survives in another life beyond.

The power of the apostles' preaching lay in their assertion of positive knowledge of facts which gave assurance of this common hope. Their faith was grounded in the absolute certainty that their crucified Master was still alive. If there is anything on earth beyond controversy it is that the disciples of the Lord believed with all their hearts that Jesus Christ had risen. They were as sure of it as they were of their own existence. And they were just as sure that His resurrection was a pledge of their own. Therein lay the wonder of their message. The empty tomb opened the grave and gate of death for all. It satisfied the one great hunger of the human heart—the desire to know of a surety whether there is another life and whether those we have loved long since and lost are lost only for a while. We want to be sure that love shall never end.

Ah! how men had hungered to have this longing of their heart satisfied; how they had reasoned, and weighed probabilities, and wrung hints from nature, and forced hopes into opinions, and tried to turn opinions into convictions—and yet had never really known.

Always there had been the hope. It is the all-but-universal instinct of the race and it has real ground of reasonable conviction. The form of matter changes, but the essential substance of the universe neither increases nor diminishes. Surely senseless atoms shall not endure and conscious spirits perish. Life is always passing on, through the death of old forms, to continued and fuller life. It cannot be different with the human life. In man the Creator has personal and intelligent connection with the world and it is inconceivable that He could be "perpetually destroying this sensitive bond by the perpetual destruction of the souls through which the bond was established."

It must be so—Plato, thou reasonest well—
 Else whence this pleasing hope, this fond
 desire,
 This longing after immortality?

This hope was made certain by Christ. He did not argue about it—argument is a terrible trifling to human hearts sick with their loss. He did not explain difficulties—how could they be explained when there is no language of human experience in which to phrase the explanation? He did not give details—when all is said, of what importance

are these by comparison with the great fact itself? He simply took for granted that death is a mere turn in the road to life eternal, because God being what He is, and man being God's child, it could not be otherwise. He filled men's hearts with trust in a heavenly Father. He made them understand the real value of human life.

His teaching, therefore, fits with singular ease and aptness into our modern ways of thinking. With us any belief in immortality must rest back upon God's moral character. Once we accept that, life beyond life is undeniable.

For the man who would have his hope pass into certainty, there is no surer path to faith than that which starts from the full recognition of this teaching of Jesus. It is not proof, of course; it is the foundation for faith. Indeed, the best things of life are felt rather than proved, and this best of all things is no exception to the rule. Against the background of Christ's teaching, however, the argument is thrown into sharper relief, and we see more clearly the force of all our reasoning.

The resurrection of Jesus made assurance doubly sure. All that He taught of im-

mortality was confirmed when He Himself was shown to be alive. Death did not end all for Him; He did live beyond the grave. We, too, therefore, are immortal; for us also there is another life. It was this that the apostles proclaimed with triumphant boldness. Their words rang as a challenge, clear, sharp, direct, decisive.

St. Paul, after a concentrated experience which crowded into a short space all that the apostles had passed through in the last days of Christ's earthly life and especially in the dark hours between Good Friday and Easter, staked all on the truth of the resurrection. "If Christ be not raised your faith is vain." "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." He would have no compromise, no half-way assurance, no ecstatic but empty rapture. A risen and triumphant Christ was the pledge of a risen and triumphant humanity, and because he was so certain of both he ventured everything and risked what men ordinarily count most precious for the hope of the eternal.

Neither he nor the apostles were the victims of an hysterical enthusiasm. The narrative shows us a group of men who had followed Christ faithfully though falteringly,

who at first understood Him very dimly, who were dazed and stunned by His death, who hid behind closed doors, with shaken hearts, in trembling expectancy, fearing lest their turn should come next, who were in utter despair at the shattering of all their hopes and full of painful penitence at their own cowardice in the crisis that removed their Master.

The story of the change which came over this panic-stricken company has been rehearsed so often that it may be condensed into a paragraph. The brief telling of it is a concentrated proof of the resurrection. Men weak, cowardly and despairing suddenly became strong, confident, bold and unafraid. Neither bonds nor imprisonment could make them waver in their testimony. They rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for the truth. Their witness compelled belief, and in their new strength they established a Church and converted the world. In the Church the core of faith was belief in the risen Lord. The very sacrament of admission was a symbolic burial with Christ, that the disciple might rise with Him into newness of life. The chief act of worship was a memorial of His death which would have been pointless and

inane did it not imply participation in His risen life and sharing in the triumph of His victory. Finally, the day which became fixed as the special Christian day of devotion was in itself a weekly proclamation of faith in Him as conqueror of death.

These things cannot be explained save on the ground that the new life of the new society was rooted in reality. No ghost story spiritualized into a gospel of the resurrection can adequately account for the upspringing of Christendom.

It is enough if we rest here on this simple statement of fact. Half the doubts of men begin beyond this point. A whole range of questions arise as to the relation between the natural and the spiritual body of the Lord, the body which hung on the cross and the body which appeared to the disciples behind the closed doors of the upper chamber. It is inevitable, of course, that there should be further enquiry and speculation; only we must remember that it *is* speculation. I may hold one hypothesis; you may hold another; both are only theories. The one essential thing is that no hypothesis shall forget the fact of the empty tomb. Jesus was crucified, dead and buried. He died

after a public execution, was buried in a well-known grave, His disciples asserted positively that He had risen, and, had not the tomb been empty, it would have been the simplest thing in the world to produce the body and dissipate the faith of His followers. One glance at it would have pricked like a bubble the emotional frenzy of the apostles. It is not enough, therefore, to declare our faith in the resurrection by stating our acceptance of the fact that Jesus survived death, as we all hope to do. Whatever it was, an actual bodily resurrection occurred.

When we come to explanations of what it was, there is nothing we can say and it seems hopeless to pursue the enquiry. The question was one which did not present itself to the minds of the evangelists. As Professor Drown reminds us, their problem was different from ours. "They expected the speedy return of the Lord and the coming of the Messianic kingdom, which was to bring in a new world order that was to be eternal. Therefore no sharp distinction was in mind between the forms of existence of this life and those of the life to come. We are to-day in a different position. We can no longer think of this earth as destined

to last forever, and we can no longer think of the life beyond in such clear and definite form as when the world to come was conceived of as so close at hand. We can no longer conceive of our own resurrection in forms that belong directly to this life. We cannot think of the body that is sown as identical with the body that shall be. Rather we believe that God will give us a body as shall please Him, in such a form of existence as we do not know, but which will become clear to us when we no longer see through a glass darkly, but face to face."

Why should not faith rest on the primary conviction and be content without light on all questions that are secondary and subsidiary? Enough for us that in the other life we shall have some sort of an instrument through which the soul can express itself—for that is the real purpose of a body, is it not? We shall need, therefore, not a natural body, but a spiritual body fitted for a spiritual world.

An illustration—a favourite one with the late Dr. Shipman—may help. You watch a waterspout. There is an eddy, a spin of wind that passes over the sea. As it sweeps along it catches up water and whirls it like a pillar towards the sky. There it stands—

an opaque column, like the trunk of a huge palm tree, between the ocean and the clouds. It passes on till it reaches the land. Then there is no more supply of water to feed it and at once it discharges itself in a torrent of rain and dies away to the eye. Is it gone altogether? No, it moves on; but it is invisible. Then the windy spiral sweeps further inland and by and by crosses a sandy desert. At once it draws in the light particles and is again visible, now as a red brown pillar stalking over the dusty waste. Then it travels beyond the verge of the desert and vanishes again.

So with ourselves. Our bodily life here is but the catching up of elements, the assimilating and sifting out of the earthly atoms which give us a visible existence. When all that is left of the body is a little heap of dust in the cemetery, are we no more? Certainly not. The spiritual body lives, though it passes over the realm of immaterialism. As the whirlwind takes up now sand and now water, and again is felt only in the spin of the invisible air, so the soul passes into the purely spiritual realm and yet finds that which enables it to express itself and make its presence known.

According to the Gospel accounts, the

risen body of Christ was similar to the body the disciples had seen before the crucifixion, and yet dissimilar. All the former substance was present, but in another form; just as water, if we may be allowed another rather crude illustration, may exist in the form of vapour.

The disciples were untroubled about all such problems, not only because their situation was so different from ours, but because they had such confident conviction of the fact of the resurrection that subsidiary questions had no place in their thought. If we could see the risen Christ to-day, as they saw Him, there would be for us such joy in believing that all problems of the "how" of the glorious fact would vanish in the gladness of the fact itself.

Shall we not gain our assurance, then, by concentrating on the simple fact of immortality? Is it not enough to begin on? That brings us back to our first text, that the way of faith is fidelity to truth. Just as the background of Christ's resurrection is found in His view of God and human life, so the root and spring of our faith must be sought in a ready willingness to live true to all that belief in immortality implies.

Are we doing that? We accept the bare fact of immortality. Our hope is that we shall survive death. We are reasonably sure that life goes on and on, beyond the grave. Are we acting as we should expect men to act who believe that, even with feeble and faltering faith?

Here, then, is the remedy for doubt. Practice the fact of immortality. Ask how any one should live who honestly felt that death is not the end of all things. We shall never have certainty of conviction save as we try to make our life story answer St. Paul's challenge: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." The early Christian believers staked all on the truth of their conviction. If by any chance they had proved mistaken, they were as fools and blind; they had given up all that men prize here in hope of greater treasures hereafter, and after losing all were only foolish visionaries robbed of their reward.

Have we made any such sacrifice? As plain matter of fact, are we acting as if we believed in a future life? Newman has a sermon on *The Ventures of Faith* which will always live in the hearts of those who have read it. If by any chance Christianity

should prove a false hope, its promises of life an iridescent dream, what should we have lost irretrievably? Imagine the whole Christian structure of truth and practice tottering to its fall, the whole beautiful scheme laid in ruins, and we ourselves standing amid the wreck and overthrow, how much the worse off would it leave us? Have we risked so much, ventured so far, committed ourselves so deeply, that we should be engulfed in the ruin? If Christianity were proved a woeful mistake, we should be disappointed, of course, but should we be of all men most miserable, with everything gone, because everything had been invested in the enterprise, with all lost, because all had been given up for this hope?

The apostles made this venture of faith, because they believed that they were treasuring a secret so rich that the world had not a price big enough to buy it away. We shall have the same secret in sure possession, only as we are ready to make the same sacrifices.

XII

WHERE THE SKY BEGINS

WHERE does the sky begin? Washington Gladden points out that an illusion similar to that which makes us think of the sky as touching the earth somewhere beyond the mountain tops makes us also conceive of the spiritual world as a distant and future fact instead of a present and immediate reality. Yet we know that the sky is not an arch or vault of blue far up beyond the earth. It is everything above the ground. As we walk in the streets we are as much in the sky as the driver of an aeroplane who circles above the clouds. And the heavenly realm also is around and near us. The spiritual and the natural penetrate and interpenetrate each other.

A spiritual consciousness is necessary if we are to have any real religious faith or life. Not that religion is mere "devotion" simply in the sense of pious meditation.

The heart and soul of religion lie not so much in the contemplation of future blessedness in another life as in the faithful performance of present duties in this life. The work of the Christian must be like that of his Master, who announced to the enquiring disciples of John the Baptist that His credentials were to be seen in His works: "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them." Instead of ceaseless longings for a heaven yet to be, we are to make this earth itself more heavenly and give men a taste of happiness here rather than a promise of bliss hereafter. Our religion must be healthy, sane, productive, useful and helpful, cheery, brave and active, the Christianity of the Christ who came down from the mountain and then led His disciples in the way of service as He went about doing good.

But—we must go up to the mountain, too. If there *is* a spiritual world, it is the height of folly to live without any thought of it. If the earthly life is but a part of the life eternal, it is absurdly stupid to live the part as if it were the whole. Our Lord, who gave such homely counsel and so practical

an example for present duties, was always going apart from the multitude; it is characteristic of Him that He "lifted up His eyes to heaven."

So the first essential of faith is the effort to enlarge the capacities that make for faith. The loss of faith ordinarily comes through neglect of the faculties by which it is kept alive. Belief does not go down in some sharp and sudden struggle with doubt; it just evaporates. Men allow themselves to become so immersed in the material that the channels of the spiritual are clogged and the religious functions cease to operate.

The classic illustration of this is found in Darwin's famous autobiographical confession, in which he tells how he lost his original taste for music, poetry and art. "My mind," he adds, "seems to have become a kind of machine for grinding general laws out of large collections of facts, but why this should have caused the atrophy of that part of the brain alone on which the higher tastes depend, I cannot conceive. If I had my life to live again, however, I should make it a rule to read some poetry and listen to some music at least once a week; for perhaps the part of my brain now

atrophied would thus have been kept active through use."

We have generally assumed that thoughts of heaven are for the sick, the weak, the aged and the handicapped, not for active youth and strong manhood; and we have forgotten how great an incentive to high ideals and fine deeds is the constant recollection that all the virtue we build into our characters here lasts for an endless eternity. Of course men can be keenly conscientious, splendidly unselfish and morally strong, without the thought of heaven, just as a soldier can fight on when there is small hope of victory; but if we are to work, not with dogged persistence but with abounding exultation and zealous enthusiasm, we need the incentive of victory just beyond. The hope of heaven is for "bright youth" as well as "snow crowned age," for "strong men" as well as "maidens meek."

Now it helps to recollection of the supernatural and the eternal if we think of the spiritual realm as present, not future, immediate, not distant—not a region far away in space, but a higher and finer sphere of being, which permeates the natural sphere. We are in the condition of a man born blind and deaf and living in two worlds

of which he knows next to nothing, the world of colour and the world of sound. What he needs, in order to know the beauties of nature, is not a change in his surroundings but a change in himself. Open his eyes and his ears, and at once he is introduced into a new world. So we are living already in the spiritual world as really as we ever shall; only the spiritual faculties are undeveloped through which we can perceive its sights and hear its sounds. If we would have a conviction of immortal life that is real and abiding, we can reach it only by patient cultivation of the faintest stirrings of spiritual life within us here and now.

The natural world itself helps us to make a beginning. It has been said of the study of nature that "it is hardly profane to characterize it as a means of grace to man." Here are depths of mystery which defy our search. We go out into the fields or the woods. Everything seems so solid and substantial that we hardly think of the invisible movement which is ceaselessly going on beneath the visible and tangible. Yet there is activity everywhere—not a blade of grass or a leaf on the trees but palpitates with abounding life. If we had eyes that could

penetrate through leaf and stem, we should be aware that all was in restless motion. Had we ears to hear we should turn mad almost at "the unceasing roar which goes on always just the other side of silence." Nor is that all. There are a hundred thoughts which come to us with their questions about nature's mystery—whence this world came, when and why it was made, how it became "subject to vanity," whether it is more than fancy which seems to link it in sympathy with man's moods, what dim and mysterious presence gives it its beauty and power. Does not all this necessarily suggest that there is a world of spirit beneath the world of sense, penetrating and vivifying it, so that what we see is but the outward and visible covering of hidden and unseen realities?

Possibly the thought may help us to understand better the idea of sacramental grace. Amid all the controversy in the churches over the Holy Communion, for example, it is worthy of note that disputants have all agreed that the Lord's Supper is in some way a means for the reception of the divine life. And why should not grace come by such a sacrament? Is not man himself a

sacrament: his body the outward and visible sign of the invisible spirit within? Is not the world, for that matter, the greatest of all sacraments, suggesting through the physical senses a spiritual life that lies behind its material manifestations? Is it altogether incongruous to suppose that the body is of such worth and dignity that it may be a sharer with the soul in redemption and in some way may survive and develop in a future state? And in that case, is it surprising that the material world should be drawn upon as an instrumental means for spiritual help? May it not be that nature itself has some interest and direct concern, if it may be put thus boldly, in the restoration of the human race? The divine plan may, indeed, have larger reaches than we have ever imagined. At any rate, it is the part of wise humility to be over-careful and modest in denial and to accept as a working hypothesis what has apparently proved its practical power in the experience of believers from the beginning.

Yet, suppose none of these thoughts appeal to you, does not the experiment of faith still urge you to come to the Lord's Table? Empty the sacrament of all mystery, if you will, and yet it is the dying

request of a loving Friend. Jesus Christ was so thoroughly human. He had all our human longing not to be forgotten, though He would be remembered for our sakes rather than His own. Suppose you go to His memorial feast, just because He asked it—not carelessly but in thoughtful remembrance, with the image of all that He was in your mind, with His words in your heart, His life quietly and devoutly recollected, with sincere desire to be like Him and something of earnest purpose to be what you desire. Explain it as you will, sooner or later your faith will grow. There are those who declare that it will know no limits. For they believe that the living Christ is here among us, powerful to bless and help. They are not troubled by any difficulties of interpretation as to His resurrection and ascension. They know He is here—the living Christ who was dead, but is alive forevermore.

To be sure, we say that He has ascended into heaven. But that does not mean that He has gone away from earth. Up and down, ascending and descending, are figures of speech. Heaven is a higher order of life, a higher sphere of being; and Christ is here, though He transcends the power of

mortal eyes to see Him. It is significant that the evangelist who records the ascension simply says that "a cloud received Him out of their sight."

His presence is a hidden presence. All the resurrection appearances had prepared the disciples for this. One moment they were alone in the upper chamber; the next moment, He came and stood in the midst. Again, they were fishing by the Sea of Galilee and they looked up, to find Him standing on the shore. The disciples met Him on the road to Emmaus and then just as they recognized Him He vanished. Was it not that they might understand that He was always at hand, whether they saw Him or not? Only, His presence is a veiled presence. When He has revealed Himself so often that they are convinced beyond the possibility of error that He is alive and is always near them, then comes what we call the Ascension—the veil drops, the cloud receives Him and He is seen no more. But He is behind the veil, above the cloud, and they are not alone. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."

If to any of us it seems incredible, may it not be that the weakness of our faith is due to our manner of life? We are so immersed

in the things of "this" world that we have paralyzed the senses by which we could become conscious of the "other" world. We need something more than an annual Easter service to revive our dormant faculties and make it possible for us to believe in the life which is unseen. Our faith is largely in our own hands. It rests with ourselves whether we shall strengthen or dissipate it.

Where does our sky begin?

XIII

COMMUNICATED CHARACTER

GOODNESS is the one thing you cannot keep to yourself. If it is real goodness, it is always going out from your heart and feeding some other man's heart. Whenever you do something fine and courageous, brave and true, you make truth and courage easier for other men. Your character is that on which some other man draws, consciously or unconsciously. The wonderful thing about a human personality is this, that it is always outflowing; it cannot be bound in or dammed up; it is a reservoir of strength, always fed by streams from without and always sending out its own streams of refreshment. "A man's courage, a man's insight, a man's experience, a man's form of character, these things flow down to weaker souls as surely as water flows down from a height above."

That would seem to be the method of approach in thinking of the sacraments of Christ. He wants us to "eat of His flesh and drink of His blood"; that is, He wants

us to absorb His life and grow in His strength. And we can do it, because character is communicable and life is always being infused with other life.

That "contemptible little army" of England which withstood the first terrific assaults of the German war machine has long since ceased to exist. Its hundred and fifty thousand men gave their lives that France might be saved. They are dead now—and yet they live. They lived in the brave hearts of the millions of other men who fought inch by inch for the battle-scarred fields of the Somme and the bruised hills of Arras when Germany's great drive began more than three years afterwards. And the sturdy, dogged, hard-holding soldiers of the new army are still fed with food of the spirit as well as with food of the body. The personal weight of many a leader is felt in all the armies of France and England. The fine spirit of the Belgian king has touched every man in his kingdom. "What have you left now?" is the question the cartoonist makes the Kaiser ask of Albert, and the reply, "I have my soul," has exercised a subtle magnetism that nerves and invigorates every brave defender of hearth and home. There are men in

whose presence we cannot be weak or cowardly, just because character cannot be confined and personality cannot be pushed within close limits. The mind gets its power as the body gets its strength, from what it feeds on; and such men are always feeding other men. You cannot be wise, or experienced, or magnanimous, or courageous; you cannot have the soul of honour and truth and virtue; you cannot have great ideals or work splendid achievements, without moulding other lives who get their strength from yours.

All this, however, sounds mystical and unreal to the average man. He does admire and revere moral greatness, but because the spirit is tied down to earth, he does not understand that what he sees in the ideas and enthusiasms of others is the thing that keeps his own soul from starving.

And so Jesus Christ tied the spiritual and the material together and made men feed on His life through things tangible and visible. It is not that He needed the sacraments and ordinances for the conveying of His grace; it is not a question of what He needs, but of what we need. Because we are dull and earth bound He must take of

the things of earth, and through them help us towards the glory of heaven.

It is not so hard to understand the sacraments of Christianity if we remember that the natural and the supernatural are always penetrating and interpenetrating each other and that the sky begins at our dust-covered feet and not far beyond the distant hilltops.

The plain man who is troubled by the difficulties of theology need only remember that the language of imagery often conveys truths and enforces realities, where the language of scientific prose would break down in the effort to give them expression. It is commonly said that when the Lord Christ declared, "This is My Body; this is My Blood," He was speaking figuratively. Of course He was, in a sense. When He used the words, His body stood before the disciples unimpaired and He surely was not speaking in humdrum prose. The difficulty is, that when men say that His language is figurative they seem to think that to call it so is to empty it of all meaning. Whereas nearly all religious language is necessarily figurative. Its figurative character, however, warns us that the meaning to be conveyed is not less, but more; the very need of a figure of speech shows that

the idea calls for a heavier burden of meaning than ordinary speech can bear. The inner conception must be at least as great as the metaphor which seeks to give it expression. We must let the imagination take in all that the figurative language stands for. We must try to conceive how great a reality it is which needs such speech to express its richness and grandeur. The language is mysterious because it deals with the most mysterious thing in the world, the touch of one personality upon another. The figure chosen to convey its meaning puts the mystery in the simplest form so that the plainest man can understand it.

One thing is certain: only actual experience of sacramental grace can make us sure of its reality. However much we may know by experience of the touch of living personalities upon our own, it is not easy for us to explain the undying influence of personalities of the past. If we still do feel their power in our lives, it is because we are sure that personalities never die and that these, though unseen, are still alive and active. We keep our hearts open to their activity because we will not let ourselves forget them.

Perhaps we shall best begin thinking

about Holy Communion by reminding ourselves that even if it were nothing more, it is a devout act of remembrance. I am writing for commonplace people; just plain, average, humdrum, unpoetical folk, whose souls rarely take flight from the edges of this busy buying and selling world. To them we say: Jesus Christ, the world's Best Friend, did not want to be forgotten. He left a dying request, that we should do a certain thing for Him "lest we forget." Go to your communion—whether you understand or not; whether you are quite sure of your faith or not—just because He asked it. Go in that way, and you will soon move on to deeper convictions—not by adding one truth to another truth, but by "living through truth to other truth." Feed on Christ in conscious remembrance, as the son feeds on the father's experience, the scholar on the teacher's wisdom, the soldier on the officer's courage.

Only, you will understand, of course, that this means that you must receive the sacred elements in the spirit of Him who offers them as the medium by which He would pass to you His strength. This involves two things:

You must come in prayer and penitence. The churches have made a terrible mistake in talking about the virtue of Holy Communion in mere mechanical terms. "Prayer is necessary, because it generates and produces the condition of soul which Christ requires. He cannot touch us or impart His personality to our souls unless we are receptive. Prayer breaks up the ground of the soul, so that the Sower can sow the seed of His own personality in it."

Again, we must come in the spirit of sacrifice. The hidden life of Christ, which He imparts by sacramental grace, is the life of sacrifice. How, then, can we come, expecting to receive a gift, disappointed if we do not feel its power, tempted to depart in unbelief because "nothing happens"—when all the while we have come without the least intention of presenting ourselves a holy, living sacrifice, acceptable to Him?

One of the compensations of war is that its wealth of self-giving has shed upon life a new glory. Its awful cloud is tinged with the silver lining of splendid sacrifice. Men are now giving of themselves, of all they possess and all they hold dear, simply for the sake of humanity.

"Tell the vicar that Jim Smith died for

old England with a good heart," said one of Kitchener's First Hundred Thousand—and all the more had he caught the very spirit of the Master because then (though it is not true now) it seemed more than doubtful whether England was worth dying for. One of the chaplains tells of a scene in a hospital back of the front in which he played a rôle that made him ashamed of his own stupidity. The chaplains are never to add to the pain of the wounded by speaking unnecessarily of their wounds. This chaplain was going from cot to cot, here saying a word of cheer, there writing a letter back home, again kneeling for a prayer, when he came to the bedside of a lad who had been sorely hurt. The man's arm was gone and he was so terribly mangled that the clergyman turned his face aside for a moment and then in his embarrassment asked an unfortunate question.

"How did you lose your arm, my lad?" he said.

The boy's face—he was hardly more than a boy—was aglow with a brave light and his tired eyes shone as he answered:

"Padre, I didn't lose it. I gave it."

The lad had made a sacrament of his suffering. Tens of thousands like him are

entering in the same way into the sacrifice of Christ, "filling up what is behind of His sufferings," to use St. Paul's bold words. The pity is, that so many of them have the spirit of Christ and are wholly unconscious of their own Christianity. They have identified Christianity with something other than this simple following of the Master. They are His, without knowing it.

And the greater pity is, that so many who profess to be His have failed to catch His spirit. One looks at those who are coming forward for Holy Communion in one of our churches. They have just said, "And here we offer and present unto Thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and living sacrifice unto Thee," and one fails to see that the words have meant anything. Sometimes, with distress, one suspects a certain smugness and self-satisfaction that not only makes their hearts unreceptive but repels others from coming to the sacred feast. There is nothing magical about Holy Communion. We get Christ's spirit only as we come in His spirit. Let us demand reality in religion; set ourselves a test by which we try our own sincerity.

And then—if you hesitate about becoming communicants because of the uncer-

tainty of your present faith, remember that whether you are sure or not you can at least live true to all that Holy Communion stands for. You do believe in the Christ life. You have learned from Him that the greatest thing about life is not the mere living. You know that self-dedication, self-offering, is the very essence of the Christ life. Live true to that conviction. Offer yourself; consecrate yourself; give yourself; and then come, just asking God to accept you. The wonderful thing is, that you will hardly have begun to come in that way before you will know of a certainty that the gift you have received far surpasses the gift you have offered. You will know that you have received of Christ's fullness, grace for grace. Uniting yourself with His sacrifice, you will find yourself united in His life.

XIV

JUDGMENT DAYS OF GOD

NOWHERE, in matters of credal interpretation, do we find a sharper contrast than that between the apostolic expectation of a sudden and immediate return of the Lord in judgment and modern belief in the second coming as a continued process rather than a single event.

There is room for large liberty of interpretation of the creeds. No one would demand a bald literalism, for example, in our understanding of such clauses as the one which declares that our Lord ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. It is generally recognized as a perfectly legitimate interpretation if we regard the statement as a declaration of belief in the fact that the incarnate Son has resumed the dignity and glory of His first estate. No one asserts that heaven must necessarily be a place "above the bright blue sky" and that somewhere within its precincts there is a great throne, with two

others on either side, and three divine Persons, in the sense in which we understand personality and individuality, seated thereon in glory!

Again, in our interpretation of belief in a resurrection body we are not bound to the old idea that the various particles of our own bodies are gathered somehow from the four winds of heaven and collected once more into a bodily structure in form similar to that which we now know. There is room for endless speculation as to what the body of the resurrection was in the case of our Lord and as to what it will be in our own case.

In this sense, therefore, the declaration that "fixity of interpretation is of the essence of the creeds" is the very opposite of the facts. We ought to avail ourselves of all the light which may be thrown upon a subject by modern science. We must aim at unfolding elements of the truth by using all the aids which criticism and research have placed at our command.

It is quite possible to do this while remaining perfectly loyal to the record. There is a plain line to be drawn somewhere between the extreme of literal interpretation of any article of faith and the other extreme

of an "interpretation" which is really denial. We may not substitute for a statement of fact some so-called spiritualization which actually empties the statement of any historical meaning. We may not construe the declared facts in such way as actually to reject them.

The point we have been trying to emphasize in these studies is that there is a middle position between the baldly literal and the wildly liberal. This *via media* is not so much a matter of position as of spirit. It sees in the insistence upon a freer interpretation, in revulsion against the mechanical delimitations of over-orthodoxy, a real attempt to discover the spiritual content of faith.

After all, most religious discussion is largely a question of view-point. If opposing disputants could only rid themselves of the controversial spirit and seek each to understand the other, there would often be found a middle ground of agreement. What we most need is that the conservative believer shall honestly try to see the difficulties of the man who moves towards faith stumblingly; especially that he shall try to give him credit for putting faith to the test of actual, every-day worth and demanding

in each case to know what it means and how it works and whether it is of practical importance. We must try, also, to understand the spirit which requires that the Church shall be truth-seeking as well as truth-bearing and truth-teaching.

Equally we have a right to ask that all honest enquiry shall be undertaken with due modesty and reverent humility. It must not start with the unavowed assumption that "former things have passed away" and that everything must necessarily be new to be true.

We may illustrate this point in the attempt to reconcile the old truth and the new as to the judgment. Where a simpler age looked for some sudden and sublime interruption of the natural order, ending in tremendous collapse, we see the unchanging operation of law. The world did not come into being suddenly, but by gradual evolution, and we have not expected it to end instantly in unparalleled catastrophe. Through centuries and ages, it has pursued its accustomed course; human history has moved on slowly from cause to effect; human life proceeds usually along ordered prosaic lines, and we find it hard to picture

a terrific interruption and cessation of the universal order coming with sublime unexpectancy.

Here, perhaps, the newer thought helps us to correct the excessive realism of the earlier. That vivid sense of the nearness of Christ's coming which was characteristic of the apostolic Church was not altogether a mistaken expectation. Centuries rolled by and the end came not. The world lived on. Yet the judgment came, nevertheless. To the man of that day the destruction of Jerusalem seemed literally the end of the world. The judgment was the death throes of an old era and the birth-pang of a new.

The prophecies of the judgment, as they are recorded in the Gospel narratives, paint a picture without perspective. In the foreground, in detail, is the immediate future, with the prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem; in the background the outlines of the distant event. The "values," however, are not well defined and foreground and background are not clearly distinguishable. What should be in dimmer light is placed in sharp relief. Probably it was best that it should be so, if for that age there was to be any vivid appreciation of the divine fact.

That simple faith was never a delusion.

Again and again the hosts have gathered at Armageddon. The destruction of Jerusalem, the fall of Rome, the Reformation in the Church, the French Revolution, now the Great War, have registered judgment. There were prophets of the Reformation, for example—Huss, Wickliffe, Catherine of Sienna—as there were prophets of the first coming, and when the judgment had laid its heavy hand upon the Church men saw that the faith and expectation of believers had not been disappointed.

I pray for peace; peace yet is but a prayer.
 How many wars have been in my brief years!
 yet do I not despair
 Of peace, that slowly through far ages nears.
 Though not to me the golden morn appears,
 My faith is perfect in time's issue fair.

For man doth build on an eternal scale,
 And his ideals are framed of hope deferred;
 The millennium came not: yet Christ did not
 fail,
 Though ever unaccomplished is His Word;
 Him Prince of Peace, though unenthroned, we
 hail,
 Supreme when in all bosoms He be heard.

This aspect of Christ's coming—what Westcott calls "the truthful and reverent recognition of God's manifestations in his-

tory and in society"—is of vital practical importance. It takes faith to see it; but faith is always needed for the recognition of spiritual realities. "None but believers saw the risen Christ during the great forty days; none but believers see Christ now in the great changes of human affairs."

The thought was urged by Dr. Figgis in a book issued before the war, which seems now to have been written with almost prophetic insight. In his *Civilization at the Crossroads* he pictured ours as an age of transition. All things around us were crumbling. Old ideas in ethics and politics, in society and government, were losing their force. Men were plunging into new and hitherto untried experiments. It was a day of new departures. We were in the midst of a process not unlike that of western Europe in the fifth century, when the world organization was on its death-bed.

Hardly had he drawn his picture when the Great War broke upon us. That surely has taught us that we are living in an awful judgment day of God. All things are being put to the test of fire. Men are wondering what the end shall be. To those who come after, this will be seen as the close of an æon. What new life shall spring up,

phoenix-like, out of the ashes of the old, we do not know; where we shall find ourselves and how our very manner of life shall change we are yet to see. But for society, for nations, for the Church, for individuals, the judgment has come. Sentence is passing on institutions and men. Prophets are already seeking to turn the judgment to its divinely appointed use. Always and everywhere we begin to see God as the Judge. He putteth down one and setteth up another. Everywhere the judgment moves continuously. Our own nation; our property and prosperity; the methods by which we gained the one, the use to which we have put the other; society and the standards with which it is content; the Church to which we belong, its failure in rich experience, its fear of freedom, its pathetic weakness as a social force; Christendom, with its unhappy divisions; the common motives of life; the principles by which our own lives have been governed—all are being brought to the test of divine approval or disapproval. Over against all stands Christ our Judge, crying as He cried over Jerusalem, "If they had known—if they had only, only known—the things which belong to their peace."

Once to every man and nation
 Comes the moment to decide,
 In the strife of truth with falsehood,
 For the good or evil side;
 Some great cause, God's new Messiah,
 Offering each the bloom or blight —
 And the choice goes on forever
 'Twixt that darkness and that light.

Though the cause of evil prosper,
 Yet 'tis truth alone is strong;
 Though her portion be the scaffold,
 And upon the throne be wrong —
 Yet that scaffold sways the future,
 And, behind the dim unknown,
 Standeth God within the shadow,
 Keeping watch above His own.

Now all this gives a starting point for faith. In the first place, it makes it less difficult to conceive of the final judgment, a judgment which shall be the consummation of all lesser visitations, a last manifestation of the justice and holiness of God. Nor will it be so difficult to accept the apostolic belief in the suddenness of the judgment. The early expectation of its immediacy was not an essential part of the belief and was to some extent an accommodation to the Jewish eschatology. Its suddenness and finality, however, seem to be elements of permanent value. They are not hard to accept now. Consider the situation

at the outbreak of the war. The mass of people could not realize it even when it had come. In England men like Earl Roberts had predicted that the conflict was inevitable, had told of Germany's long and careful preparation, had pointed out the peril of her ambition for world-power, but none would hear. When at length the Serbian assassination, like a torch, set all Europe ablaze, it still could not be realized to what gigantic proportions the horror would grow. Here in America especially, in our national isolation, few could be made to see that there was any likelihood of our being drawn into the struggle. There was a week in July, 1914, when the nations rested in tranquil security and in another week we were involved in a world catastrophe so terrible that it paralyzes thought. It was a startling and inconceivably sudden turn of events, which makes it easier to understand how there may be a like sudden manifestation in the end of time. It gives vivid reality to descriptions of that judgment which once seemed childish in their crude simplicity of picturesque metaphor.

In that great day of the Lord all hidden things will be made clear, all riddles solved, all mysteries revealed, all untruth exposed,

all injustice overthrown, all wrongs righted and every person and everything seem absolutely as they are before God. Whether the manifestation come suddenly or not, it will be sudden for us. Underneath the accustomed order, all the while, the slow process of preparation is going on, though we see it not, just as events were moving steadily towards this world disaster, though we were wholly unaware of the impending evil. For long years the molten masses of the volcano gather in turbulent power before the sudden eruption hurls them forth to blight and destroy.

And ourselves—what does all this mean for us? Surely, we see that we, too, are always living in a judgment day of God and that the judgments passed upon us now, day by day, shall at last be summed up forever in a final verdict. There will then be no loose standard of public opinion to give a false sense of security, no absorbing occupation to distract our thought, but only solitude and awful silence, in which we shall see ourselves (for the first time) in revealing light and know how we appear in the sight of God.

Nothing has been said in this essay to-

wards faith of any theory of the atonement. It has not seemed necessary that anything should be said. The time is long past when men are concerned with the old controversies. All that could shed light on the mystery of redemption has been written long ago.

It is enough now to add that the thought of judgment does of necessity bring in its train the thought of the need of some atoning and redeeming power. It makes us see that sin is more than an unfortunate slip, a foolish mistake, a grave misfortune. Sin is the deliberate setting of our wills against the will of God. There is need of some unmistakable disclosure of the heart of God before we can see this. Such a revelation, surpassingly great, we have in the cross of Christ.

So atonement and redemption must be viewed together. Just as any serious attempt to measure our lives over against the life of Jesus Christ convinces us that He is a direct gift of God, so any such comparison forces upon us a sense of the awfulness of sin and of the need of deliverance. In the death of Christ, and nowhere else, we see the shame and the pain of sin. There its full horror is realized. Just as "human for-

givenness in its best forms is saved from being demoralizing when the forgiven child is made to see the pain its fault has brought to the forgiving parent," so do we discover, as the cross reveals to us sin's exceeding hatefulness, the awful analogue of such human forgiveness in that divine forgiveness which comes indeed freely, but comes by divine Love itself bearing, before our eyes, our sins or their results. In the supreme moment of pardon we see that pardon is made possible because at last we see sin as God sees it.

"Come down from the cross, O Thou Holy One of God"—so cried the African saint in the fervour of adoring gratitude and with a passionate warmth of which our calmer and colder spirits seem incapable—"come down from the cross; it is I that should be there, not Thou."

XV

THE DEMAND FOR REALITY

JESUS CHRIST and His religion come to us charged with reality. One thing He always asked of those who would follow Him: they must be absolutely sincere.

A rich young man, asking the way of life, began his question with a complimentary salutation, "Good Master." Jesus brings him up with a sharp turn. Just what does the young man mean? Is he sure that he knows himself? "Why callest thou Me good?" The Master wants no mere polite phraseology, no vague and empty compliment, no speech that is not perfectly genuine. He wants reality. He rigidly tests every expression of devotion. He is impatient—divinely impatient—of anything that savours in the least of conventional and careless acceptance of Him or His claims. He wants only love and loyalty that are beyond question.

An emotional woman in the crowd, on one occasion, cried out, "Blessed is the womb that bare Thee." She was thinking

how wonderful it was to have such a son, how enviable was the lot of the mother who had held Him as a child to her bosom. She was day-dreaming, instead of facing actualities, and her dream broke out in emotional sentimentality, in a longing for a relation that could never be hers. The Master brought her back to solid realities: "Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God and keep it."

The man out of whom Christ had cast the demons, in a fervid burst of emotion, asked to join the apostolic company. It was an impossible place for him, and Jesus pointed him to a plain, humdrum, every-day duty: "Go back home to your family and your friends and tell them what great things I have done for you." Another said, "Lord, I would follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest." The Master brought him back to earth by telling him of the hardships of such a service ("Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head") and we hear no more of the proffered discipleship.

In every case there is a sharp reminder of homely practicalities and a warning against any expression of religious feeling that has not the note of absolute genuine-

ness. He wants us to be perfectly honest with ourselves and perfectly straightforward and unaffected in our words. In His presence anything like cant or unreality stands out in the white light of truth and shames us into sincerity.

One wonders how some of us are standing the test now. The man outside probably sees something of unreality among professed believers. Possibly, without his even being aware of the thought in the back of his mind, this is one of the things that keeps him outside. Press him hard and he would probably confess that there is a certain smug professionalism about some of the clergy that irritates him. Their immunity from friendly criticism has been disastrous and they have dropped into a habit of ready moralizing that seems to him wholly perfunctory. Their words do not always ring true. The one thing we clergy need most to pray against is the special ecclesiastical sin of insincerity. Our wills may be weak and our lives faulty, but at least let us be sure that we speak only when we actually believe and feel all we say. There is a glibness of spiritual speech that verges close to sacrilege and no one is more keenly

sensitive to it than the man who is outside the Christian fellowship. He looks in with critical eyes, not because he wants to criticize or is even aware that he does criticize, but because he is unconsciously "sizing up" those who are in a different position from himself. It may be that he is longing for contact with somebody who can understand his difficulties and help him towards faith, and he is disappointed at missing what he so sorely needs to help him on his way. He wants the clergyman to be a real man, big-minded and big-hearted, free from pettiness of spirit or lack of charity and generosity towards those who cannot see with him eye to eye. He wants a minister to be "straight as a string," frank, sincere, genuine, true; and when he meets such a man he greets him with great joy. The suspicion that some are different is the true source of much of his doubt. His difficulties would dissolve if more often he could see in the fruit of Christian experience the assurance of the Christian hope. He is quietly observing not the clergyman alone, but his congregation, and as quietly making up his mind about the genuineness of their faith.

And we also may demand the same down-

right sincerity of the man or woman outside. We, too, are human enough to be irritated by cant and unreality. Personally, my own pet aversion is the woman who has read some lovely little book about a pious fisherman or a godly village shoemaker and complacently informs me, as if she had made a great spiritual discovery, that this is her ideal of religion, when she knows and I know (and she ought to know that I know) that she has not the faintest notion of putting the ideal into practice. I get almost as impatient with the man who tells me that he likes to worship God out under the blue sky, and then loses his temper when I ask how much of his outdoor time is actually given to heavenly aspirations. Next after him I rank the broad-minded people who like all churches and love none, who see good in all and go nowhere.

These chapters have been written for men who are trying to be real. Yet is there not a possibility that even with the best of intentions they too have not always faced facts squarely? That is one reason for pressing home the duty of living true to truth. We all of us need to do some heart searching every now and then. A very little self-examination will show that pos-

sibly we are content with an ideal without making any real effort to follow it. Perhaps the war will shame out of us our selfishness and self-satisfaction and narrow class prejudice, and make us think of something other than our own comfort or our own opinions, our position and our reputation. God knows some of us need a moral earthquake to shake us out of our self-esteem. In all charity, are there not many who, like the rich young man, have been paying compliments to a Master who would be worshipped? Have they been using reverential language about the character of Jesus Christ, without giving the subject very serious thought, and consequently without well weighing the implications of their words? It would be worth while for them to put their admiration for Christ to the test of reality and ask conscientiously whether their reverence is genuine enough to make them translate admiration into action. It has already been shown that this is the path to faith.

As with our conduct, so with our intellectual conceptions. The effort to be real in all one says about Christ brings one back inevitably to St. Augustine's dilemma,

“Christ, if He is not God, is not a good man.” The point has never been pressed more sharply than by Canon Liddon. “It is easier,” he puts it, “to believe that in a world where we are encompassed by mysteries, where our own being is itself a consummate mystery, the Moral Author of the wonders about us should, for great moral purposes, have taken to Himself a created form, than that the one Human Life which realizes the ideal of humanity, the one Man who is at once perfect strength and perfect tenderness, the one Pattern of our race in whom its virtues are combined and from whom its vices are eliminated, should have been guilty, when speaking of Himself, of an arrogance, of a self-seeking, of an insincerity, which if admitted must justly degrade Him far below the moral level of millions among His unhonoured worshippers.” Does not our Lord’s human glory fade before our eyes when we attempt to conceive of it apart from His divinity? He is perfect as Man only because He is truly God. If He is not God, He is not a humble and an unselfish man. When we call Him “Good Master,” or use some modern equivalent for the rich young man’s word of reverent esteem, reality de-

mands that we follow our thought about Christ into all its logical meaning, or at least make sure in our own minds that we know what we mean by it ourselves.

The whole purpose of the creed is to give expression to the faith of the Church about Christ. It is the accredited language through which, for centuries, Christ's followers have sought to voice their loyalty to His Person. All of its clauses are to be interpreted in subordination to this main purpose. Viewed as explanatory of this, or as guarding the truth about Jesus, their difficulties are more readily resolved. One can hardly conceive of a society pledging itself to His service on any smaller foundation of faith. The creed is more than creed. It is at once creed and character, dogma and devotion, logic and life.

Nor is it merely a personal declaration, it is a corporate confession of belief. It is the expression of the best thought of the best minds of all the ages, as they have sought to make Christ known, with all that He means to them. Wisdom was not born with ourselves. The simple-hearted, loyal souls who long ago, in troublous times, forged out the words of the creed in stress and

strain, as they tried to understand Christ better, were but seeking for language in which to explain their own certain experience and in which also to "set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, who were eye-witnesses and ministers of the word." If we can accept this central truth and try to make it a core of tremendous purpose, may we not honestly use the creed, even though we have not yet entered fully into all its richness of meaning?

This is not, as Professor Drown has so well pointed out, an arbitrary acceptance of statements on the mere basis of an external authority. It is, rather, to suggest that "in religious and Christian matters, as well as in scientific and political matters, the individual may well take account of an experience that is wider than his own. In scientific and in political matters we constantly live in reliance on such wider experience. May not the individual Christian, expressing his loyalty to Christ and to the fellowship that comes from Him, naturally expect to find in the creed which is the outcome of that fellowship, elements that go beyond his own experience?"

That means, in other words, to adopt the childlike attitude of true discipleship. That, again, means full recognition of the fact that "spiritual things are spiritually discerned"—and the essence of spiritual discernment is reverent humility in the presence of divine mystery.

The same spirit should influence one's attitude towards the Church. The man who honestly desires to help his brother man will hesitate long and meditate carefully before allowing anything but really insurmountable difficulties to hold him back from fellowship with the good men of all ages who have found in the Christian faith their incentive and strength for service.

After all, with its many glaring faults and patent inconsistencies, the Church has always numbered in its membership the real fighting strength of the Christian army. What sort of a soldier is he who falls out of the ranks now and never answers roll call? On the whole, the people who want to do right are to be found within the Christian society. Here, then, though their faults be fully recognized, is material to work with, or (if you will) to work upon. Where can better material be found?

Despite the dead load of respectability which upon occasion hinders the advance of the kingdom, in the main the God-fearing remnant has always been found in "the communion of the saints," the fellowship of the faithful. Here at least are followers at hand for any one who has a genius for leadership.

You men to whom we appeal are men from whom we have a right to look for such leadership. Your responsibility for service is positive. It may be doubted whether you have always recognized this. We ask of you not merely clear thinking, but helpful action; not criticism only, but constructive work. Some years since, Senator Lodge pointed out that the chief defect of modern culture was its tendency to arouse unduly the critical spirit, manifesting itself in a censoriousness and dissatisfaction with things in general coupled with an incapacity for "team work." There are plenty of intellectual "mugwumps" in the world, and no less plentiful are the spiritual "mugwumps," who pass criticism on evils which they make no practical effort to correct, and because of minor difficulties and objections hesitate to join in common effort to remedy what they deplore. Men who are content

to be mere negatives in a world of action sin against the light. If those who by reason of large opportunity are better fitted for leadership leave others at the wheel they have no right to complain about the course over which they are driven. We are debtors to the community. We ought also to be faithful citizens of the kingdom. In both spheres we shall have to work with imperfect material and inefficient assistance; but it is our business to overcome obstacles. Men glory in difficulties that test their strength in the affairs of every-day work; why run away from like difficulties in their work for God?

It all resolves itself into the question whether a man is dead in earnest. And that shall be our last question as we urge men to make the experiment of faith. Jesus Christ demands reality. Do we "ring true"?

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